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ABSTRACT

A project examined how General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) are evolving and how far their development is in line with the objectives originally set out for them by the government. Information was collected from institutions in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, which began offering GNVQs in 1993-94. The survey examined the five subject areas generally available to centers: art and design, business, health and social care, leisure and tourism, and manufacturing. Data were collected on Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs. Detailed responses were obtained from 156 centers and 1,103 students. Findings indicated major differences between schools, further education (FE) colleges, and sixth-form colleges in the sort of GNVQ programs offered. The most popular area of study was business. Centers chose to offer GNVQs because the government was perceived to be phasing out older awards. The rapid growth of GNVQ enrollments reflected a major change in young people's educational aspirations rather than any characteristics of the awards themselves. Very large numbers of GNVQ students aspired to higher education. The actual qualifications of the current Advanced GNVQ cohort differed substantially from those given by centers as their official entry criteria. Approaches to core skills teaching were extremely variable. GNVQs seemed to be evolving very much as an educational rather than vocational award. (Twenty-seven resources for further reading are listed.) (YLB)

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GNVQs 1993–94
a national survey report

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an interim report of a joint project

the evolution of GNVQs:

enrolment and delivery patterns

and their policy implications

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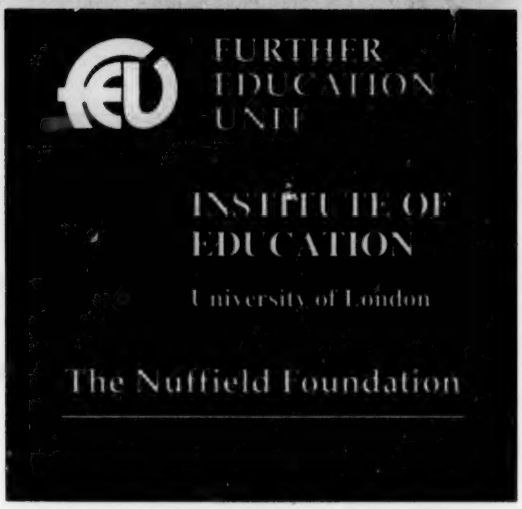

GNVQs 1993–94
a national survey report

an interim report of a joint project

the evolution of GNVQs:

enrolment and delivery patterns

and their policy implications

Jointly published by the Further Education Unit, the Institute of Education, University of London and The Nuffield Foundation

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FOREWORD

This is the interim report of a project funded by the Further Education Unit and the Nuffield Foundation on the introduction of General National Vocational Qualifications into schools and colleges. The research is being carried out by a team led by Alison Wolf from the Institute of Education, University of London.

Both FEU and the Nuffield Foundation welcomed the original concept and principles of GNVQs and both organisations have been actively involved in supporting schools and colleges which are introducing the new qualifications. However, a development of the magnitude and importance of GNVQs needs to be carefully monitored and it is for this reason that FEU and the Nuffield Foundation were keen to establish and support a national survey of GNVQ enrolment and delivery patterns as they evolve. It was important to both organisations that such a project should be independent of those charged with drafting the criteria for the new qualification and co-ordinating its development, and the results should be publicly available. The project is, we believe, the single most comprehensive study of GNVQs carried out so far — covering GNVQs awarded by all three awarding bodies, and schools and colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The research for this report was carried out over the first year in which GNVQs were generally available (1993-4). There are some important findings in the report, especially in relation to the characteristics of the student group recruited to GNVQ programmes and the learning programmes they follow. The report is also able to confirm and quantify some suspected trends for which comprehensive and reliable data have not been available to date. For example, the project has collected data to indicate that, as intended, GNVQs are taken almost exclusively by students aged between 16 and 19 and as full-time courses. Similarly, the project has been able to quantify the ways in which GNVQ students and courses differ according to type of institution.

The report highlights two issues which are of critical importance. First, it shows that GNVQs are being seen by students primarily as a route to further and higher education. This is encouraging but if the Government's target — that 25% of the age cohort should be studying for GNVQs in 1997 — is met and if the majority of those students are aspiring to progress to higher education, then there are profound implications for the higher education system in the coming years.

Conversely, the reported weakness of the existing GNVQs as vocational qualifications capable of attracting students who wish to progress directly to employment suggests that GNVQs may not yet be meeting the original objective of providing a clear pathway in this direction. It is important that as GNVQs develop into new vocational areas this apparent imbalance should be addressed.

We believe that this report is of major significance and will be of interest to policy makers and GNVQ providers alike. Comments on the report are welcome and should be addressed to Aidan Pettitt, Lead Development Officer for GNVQs at FEU.

Geoff Stanton, Chief Officer, Further Education Unit
Anthony Tomei, Assistant Director, The Nuffield Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report is based on detailed information from a representative national sample of institutions ('centres') in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which began offering GNVQs in 1993-4 — the 'post-pilot' year and the one in which GNVQs were first generally available. The survey examined the five subject areas which were generally available to centres: Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, Leisure & Tourism, and Manufacturing. Data were collected on Intermediate GNVQs (which are equated with four to five GCSEs) and Advanced GNVQs (which are equated with 2+ GCE A levels). Questionnaires were completed by GNVQ co-ordinators, by the individual teachers or team leaders responsible for delivering particular GNVQs, and by students in a sub-sample of the centres. In addition, site visits were made to a number of the institutions in the survey.

   Detailed responses were obtained from 156 centres - 86 schools, 51 further education colleges, 16 sixth-form colleges and three specialist institutions — and from 1103 students. The characteristics of the sample are in line with national data on all the (few) variables for which comprehensive national figures are available.

2. There are major differences between schools, FE colleges and sixth-form colleges in the sort of GNVQ programmes offered. While the majority of centres offering GNVQs are schools, the majority of GNVQ students are in FE colleges. Schools are much more likely to offer Intermediate GNVQ programmes than Advanced: very few offer Advanced awards other than in Business. Colleges are almost as likely to provide Advanced as Intermediate programmes, and generally offer a larger proportion of the available GNVQs.

   GNVQs are currently offered only by the three approved 'awarding bodies': BTEC, City & Guilds and RSA Examining Board. The large majority of FE colleges offer GNVQs only through BTEC, whereas in schools, BTEC is the choice of a minority, and City and Guilds the most popular awarding body. Sixth-form colleges are the most likely to use a mix of awarding bodies. Almost three-quarters of the students in the sample institutions were registered with BTEC, reflecting colleges' larger enrolments.

3. The most popular area of study by a wide margin was Business, which was offered at Intermediate, Advanced, or both by a majority of centres, and accounted for around 40% of student enrolments. Very few centres offered Manufacturing: those who did were overwhelmingly likely to offer only Intermediate awards.

   Drop-out rates during 1993-4 were around 20% on average for Intermediate GNVQs (usually offered as one-year full-time courses) and a bit under 20% over the first year of Advanced GNVQs (generally offered as two-year full-time courses). Drop-out rates at this level are consistent with those which have been recorded for longer-standing vocational awards.

4. The study found little evidence of centres choosing to offer GNVQs because of a definite preference for them over other pre-existing vocational or pre-vocational awards. GNVQs were chosen because the government was perceived to be fully committed to replacing existing awards, and making GNVQs the main non GCE-A-level qualification for students in post-compulsory education. There is no evidence at present of GNVQs replacing either GCE A levels or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) .

   In many centres, especially FE colleges, GNVQs were introduced as direct replacements for either BTEC or City and Guilds analogues.. Other centres, especially schools, were expanding their vocational and post-compulsory programmes and selected GNVQs in preference to older awards because the latter were clearly being phased out.

5. GNVQ students are part of the very rapid increase in the proportions of young people staying in full-time education which is taking place. GNVQ students are overwhelmingly aged between 16 and 19, and have entered their courses direct from full-time education. Eighty per cent of those following Intermediate courses enter these direct from GCSE. This is true for about half the Advanced students. The others, with very few exceptions, have entered Advanced GNVQ courses after following other educational courses for a year or more.

   The rapid growth of GNVQ enrolments currently reflects a major change in young people's educational aspirations rather than any characteristics of the awards themselves. Students' longer term plans and expectations (see below) indicate that this shift is a long-term one and not merely a response to the recent recession.

6. This pattern can be expected to continue in the future. Three-quarters of the current Intermediate student group expect to remain in education next year: half plan to progress to taking an Advanced GNVQ and a quarter some other full-time qualification (GCE A levels for a few; or other FE courses. Very few plan to take NVQs.) These plans imply a continuing rise in the numbers staying in education and, even more markedly, in the average length of time they spend in post-compulsory education.

7. Very large numbers of GNVQ students aspire to higher education. Almost two-thirds of current Advanced students expect that, three years from now, they will be following higher education courses or in specialist training (mostly nursing). Forty per cent of Intermediate students have the same aspirations and expectations. They intend to progress, via Advanced GNVQ or other full-time courses, to higher education and advanced specialist training. Centre staff express concerns over the ability of many Intermediate students to cope with Advanced GNVQs so these latter aspirations may not be entirely realistic. Overall, however, students' plans signal large increases in the demand for HE.

8. This view reflects the emergence of an apparent national consensus over the standard of Advanced GNVQs, and the population at which they are aimed: but continuing confusion over the standard and target population for Intermediate awards. Around two-thirds of centres state that the entry criterion for Advanced GNVQs is at least 4 Cs at GCSE. At Intermediate, around a quarter of centres had no formal entry requirements at all last year, and other cite a wide variety of requirements, most involving many different combinations and levels of GCSEs.

9. In spite of the apparent consensus over Advanced GNVQs' target population and standard, the actual qualifications of the current Advanced GNVQ cohort differ substantially from those given by centres as their official entry criteria. About half (49%) have GCSE grades lower than the minimum level of four Cs which is usually cited. As might be expected, the GCSE grades of those students starting Advanced courses straight after GCSE are significantly higher than for the group which has already completed a year of post-compulsory education.

   It seems likely that a mis-match between official and actual entry requirements for Advanced GNVQs will continue. GCE A levels recruit around a third of the 16-18 age cohort, a figure which has been rising. The vast majority of those with high grades at GCSE take GCE A levels. For example, in 1991 36% of the GCSE cohort obtained five or more grades at C or above including Maths and English: and four-fifths of this group took GCE A levels two years later.

   GCE A-level entries will have to fall substantially if Advanced GNVQs are both to recruit a large proportion of the age cohort and operate with current formal entry criteria. Alternatively, and more probably, the average GCSE results of Advanced GNVQ students will continue to fall below current supposed 'entry requirements'.

10. The GCSE grades of Intermediate students are, as would be expected, lower than for Advanced students. However, there is considerable overlap: 79% of Intermediate students have two or fewer GCSEs at C or above, but so do a third of Advanced students. Intermediate students have, on average, between three and four GCSEs at grade D or above. Intermediate students whose academic achievements are at the lower end of the scale (GCSEs at E or F) have often found Intermediate GNVQs very difficult. There is general consensus that the awards are more demanding than the BTEC First Diplomas or the C&G Diplomas in Vocational Education which they are replacing, and are not suitable for all the students recruited to these qualifications last year. However, some centres query whether older students will be willing to take the Foundation level GNVQ courses which may be the alternative.

11. Among 1993-4 GNVQ students as a whole, over half (55%) have a C or above in English, which is almost exactly the same as for the 1993 GCSE cohort. However, their average performance in Maths and Science is much weaker. One possible explanation is the nature of the 'first five' GNVQs, which are largely non-technical and non-scientific. Another is the common requirement that students taking GCE A-level courses obtain a C or above in English and Maths at GCSE, and the corresponding tendency of most students with Cs in Maths as well as English to take A Levels.

12. GCSE C grades in Maths and English (or their equivalent) are often required by higher education. Many GNVQ students whose grades in these subjects fall below C are retaking their GCSEs in these subjects - but many more are not. The highest proportions of re-sits are to be found among students whose previous grade was a D - reflecting staff belief that those with lower grades than D are unlikely to register major improvements on a re-sit. However, only 40% of Intermediate students with a D, and 33% of Advanced students with a D are re-sitting Maths. The corresponding figures for English are 45% and 40%. There are also major differences between types of institution in the extent to which students are able or encouraged to re-sit their GCSEs. For example, 40% of Intermediate students in sixth-form colleges are re-sitting English compared to 19% in FE colleges: and 44% of Intermediate students in schools are re-sitting Maths compared to eight per cent in FE.

13. The core skills of communication and application of number may provide opportunities for important additional learning in English and Maths. However, only a small minority of centres (about ten per cent) provide core skills teaching above the mandatory level. For Intermediate GNVQs this means that core skills are being taught for the most part at 'level 2', conventionally interpreted as corresponding to levels 5 and 6 in the National Curriculum. This is well below the National Curriculum levels associated with higher GCSE grades.

    The survey also indicates that approaches to core skills teaching are extremely variable, both in the amount of time allocated and the approach taken. Many centres are planning to change their approach in the future because of dissatisfaction with their experiences but these centres have themselves used a variety of approaches, suggesting that none of the current strategies has proven very satisfactory.

14. Most students of both Advanced and Intermediate GNVQs are taking them as full-time courses. Staff emphasise the volume of work required for the award and the consequent difficulty, for most pupils, of taking other qualifications as well.

    The vocational units of an Advanced GNVQ are formally equated with two GCE A levels. This allows expressly for their combination with a GCE A level or other awards. Approximately 15% of the Advanced students and four per cent of the Intermediate students sampled are combining their GNVQs with one or (occasionally) two GCE A levels. This is most common in Art & Design, where approximately a quarter of students are combining a GNVQ with a GCE A level — generally in an Art-related subject (e.g. Art, Photography). For the other vocational areas, the figure is around 11%. As reported above, GNVQs at Advanced and Intermediate level are also quite often combined with GCSE resits in Maths or English. 'Additional' GNVQ units were only just becoming available during 1993-4 and the awarding bodies expect them to be offered most often during the second year of an Advanced award. This may account for the fact that very few students or centres in this survey reported offering them.

15. GCE A-level uptake is one of the very few respects in which the survey found significant differences between different GNVQs. The academic profile of the students studying different subjects at a given level tends to be very consistent. At Intermediate level, a somewhat greater proportion of students of Leisure and Tourism expect to leave education for work at the end of their course than in other areas: but at Advanced level there are no such differences — approximately equal proportions across subject areas aspire to higher education. There is a great deal of variation in the amount of time devoted to GNVQ courses, as there is (see above) in the way core skills are delivered: but these differences apply within vocational areas as much as to the sample as a whole.

16. GNVQs seem, at present, to be evolving very much as an educational rather than vocational award. This is reflected in their student population (generally young, full-time), student plans and aspirations (for further and higher education), and in their separation from NVQs within college management and marketing structures. Only about five per cent of course team leaders reported that they had any GNVQ students working for NVQ units and very few students expressed any interest in proceeding to an NVQ.

17. Centre staff responsible for delivering existing, specialised full-time vocational training courses in further education expressed doubts about whether existing and prospective GNVQs would provide satisfactory substitutes for these awards. Nor have these courses, in general, been suitable for conversion to, and provision as, NVQs.

18. GNVQs were originally conceived as a bridge between academic and vocational education: as a broad preparation for employment and a route to higher education, as enjoying parity with academic awards and clearly related to occupationally specific NVQs. At present, they are evolving as an educational pathway but the objective of establishing links with NVQs is not being realised.

19. In summary, the survey findings call into question whether, without additional changes, post-compulsory education can be encompassed within the clear tripartite structure of GCE A levels, GNVQs and NVQs envisaged by current policy. It highlights continuing problems with the levels of key basic skills (especially Maths and English) acquired by the students in post-compulsory education. It also indicates that current increases in staying-on rates reflect genuine changes in young people's aspirations, as reflected in, for example, the numbers of actual and prospective Advanced GNVQ students who also complete intermediate post-GCSE courses. Current patterns are likely to create major further increases in the demand for higher education.

INTRODUCTION

This is the first report of the joint Further Education Unit, Institute of Education and Nuffield Foundation project *The Evolution of GNVQs: Enrolment and Delivery Patterns and their Policy Implications*. The project's major purpose is to examine how GNVQs (General National Vocational Qualifications) are evolving, and how far their development is in line with the objectives originally set out for them by the government.

As most readers will be aware, GNVQs were introduced into England, Wales and Northern Ireland very recently, and at high speed. The need for a 'range of general qualifications within the NVQ framework' was announced in May 1991 in the White Paper *Education and Training for the Twenty-first Century*. Over a period of months draft specifications for five different vocational areas were produced, circulated widely for consultation, and finalised. In September 1992 students in a pilot group of school and colleges began to study for the awards at levels 2 and 3 (later labelled Intermediate and Advanced). Level 1 (Foundation) awards were introduced in 1993, along with Intermediate and Advanced awards in a number of other areas: more GNVQs in new vocational areas have started in September of this year (1994).(See Appendix I)

The rationale for the policy was set out by the White Paper, which noted that 'many young people want to keep their options open... (including) the possibility of moving on to higher education' and that 'Employers too want to have the opportunity of developing their young recruits' general skills, as well as their specific working skills.' The Department for Education (DFE) has since added that it is current government policy that 'GCE A level and GNVQ systems should provide the main basis for the programmes of study of students aged 16-19 in full-time education' and that 25% of 16 year olds should be starting on GNVQ courses by 1996. (DFE 16.4.93)

The new awards were a response to the emerging limitations of NVQs as a qualification for young people, especially those not in employment, and the concurrent growth in post-16 staying-on rates. The NVQ framework was originally expected to encompass all vocational awards, including BTEC's but the development process produced very occupationally specific awards, with little provision for general education, and a requirement for workplace experience and assessment which makes them very difficult for education establishments to offer. GCE A levels, which were designed for a much smaller part of the age group, were already, by 1991, taken by around a third of the 16-18 cohort — a figure which has continued to rise — and rapid increases in educational enrolments post-16 underlined the demand for qualifications other than GCE A levels and NVQs.

The new GNVQ awards have a variety of quite specific purposes which, if all were achieved, would create a coherent tripartite structure with defined pathways between different tracks — something far closer to the systems common in continental Europe than anything that has previously existed in England. Thus, the White Paper specified that 'General NVQs should...

> offer a broad preparation for employment...
>
> (be) an accepted route to ...higher education...
>
> be of equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level
>
> be clearly related to the occupationally specific NVQs...
>
> be suitable for use by full-time students in colleges, and if appropriate in schools...'

Self-evidently, however, to state these objectives is not to guarantee them. Other initiatives in the past (notably the Certificate in Pre-Vocational Education, CPVE) have been greeted with enormous initial enthusiasm, but failed to meet their objectives or attract their target candidates. The eventual role of GNVQs in post-16 education and training will depend on

what sort of candidates they actually attract, the sorts of course offered, the degree to which they are perceived to be delivering nationally consistent standards, and their reception by employers and higher education (HE) admissions officers.

This project set out to provide a systematic evaluation of how far current enrolment and delivery patterns for GNVQs indicate 'fitness for purpose' — i.e. how far the award is developing in a way consistent with the different objectives set out by the White Paper. The following questions were of specific interest:

A. **How far do emerging patterns of GNVQ delivery indicate 'fitness for purpose' in terms of the original White Paper objectives: namely that the award should offer a broad preparation for employment and an accepted route to higher education; and that it should achieve parity with academic qualifications and be clearly related to occupationally specific NVQs?**

The future of GNVQs as a bridge between the academic and vocational, and as a desirable qualification for young people to pursue obviously rests on how far these original purposes are achieved. Information on the prior achievement levels of candidates; on what other courses they are following; and on how far they are able to obtain credit towards NVQs and/or entry to higher level courses are all relevant.

B. **How far are current modes of delivery providing a truly national award, delivered to common standards across the country?**

The current wholesale reform of post-16 education and training has been inspired in large part by the absence, in England and Wales, of a clearly structured, uniform and nationally recognised system of awards for non GCE-A-level candidates: and GNVQ awards are expected to 'mean' the same, in terms of content and standard, irrespective of where they are obtained. This project is not directly concerned with standards in the 'outcomes' sense: analysis and comparison of portfolios, grading decisions, etc. are outside its scope. It is, however, concerned with whether important differences in the nature of the award are emerging between schools and colleges and, more generally, with whether the student body, the time and resources given to the award, and the positioning of GNVQs within the post-16 system are tending to a stable national pattern, or are highly diverse and unpredictable.

Of particular interest here are possible differences between schools, FE and sixth-form colleges. Although GCE A levels have been offered successfully by all three types of institution for many years, many schools and some sixth-form colleges have limited experience with vocational awards, which have until recently mainly been available through FE colleges. One of the reasons for the general welcome given to GNVQs is that they enable schools to offer a broader programme which provides alternatives for all potential post-GCSE students. The differences in experience, staff backgrounds and facilities mean, however, that the way GNVQ requirements are interpreted, and also which subjects are offered, may diverge considerably between the different types of institution.

C. **How far is a hierarchy of awards emerging within the GNVQ structure?**

Qualifications are universally used as a selection mechanism as well as a way of accrediting skills: and not only insofar as they act as a direct screening mechanism for higher education entry. Employers, for example, use applicants' qualifications — vocational and academic — as a way of indicating the relative standing of candidates as well as their substantive achievements.

The complexity of English vocational awards has made them difficult to use in this way, compared to, for example, equivalent awards within the French, Dutch or German system. This had advantages for some young people who had not done well within formal education and increased the openness of the labour market and further education entries: but is also an important reason for relatively low rates of staying on and take-up of

vocational education and training in England and Wales. The NVQ and GNVQ initiatives are intended to make the whole system more transparent, and increase participation in and the attraction of further qualifications.

However, if this succeeds we may also find — as in other countries — that a distinct hierarchy will emerge among these awards. Such a hierarchy already exists within GCE A levels, where some subjects are seen as more difficult and more prestigious than others. It also exists within all well-established European vocational education systems — among German apprenticeships, for example, as well as among the different technical baccalauréats and the different Brévet d'Etudes Professionnelles (BEP) awards in France*. A major concern of the project is to track the degree to which such a hierarchy is emerging among GNVQs and the factors related to higher or lower status for an award.

Many of the issues mentioned above will be the subject of future data collection and reports: the following pages represent only the first stage of analysis of 1993-4 data. They do, however, provide findings of direct relevance to all the major issues raised above, and in particular *the degree to which GNVQs are providing a bridge between the academic and vocational sectors.*

* Roughly equivalent to Intermediate GNVQs

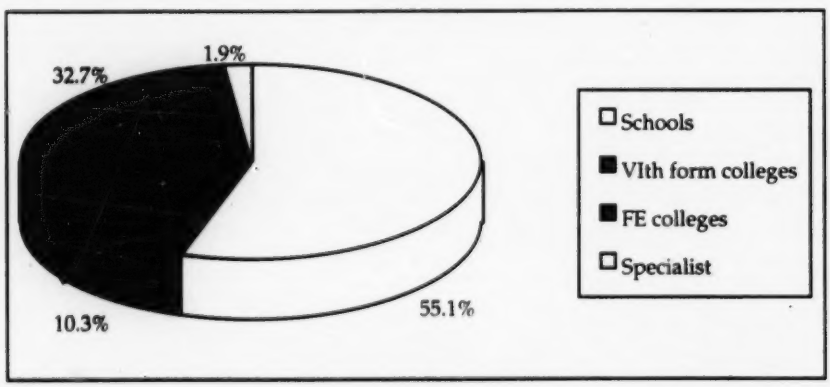
COMPOSITION OF SAMPLES IN THIS STUDY

Institutional data

A short questionnaire, checking which GNVQs were being offered (in the first five subject areas only), was sent to all centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which were offering GNVQs for the first time in 1993-4.* From the 804 returns a sample of 225 centres (74 FE colleges, 26 sixth-form colleges and 125 schools) willing to participate in the study was drawn. The sample was drawn randomly within categories but a larger proportion of colleges than schools was sampled to reflect the much larger average number of students in FE colleges than in schools. These centres all received more detailed questionnaires — a general one to the GNVQ Co-ordinator, and individual subject-specific questionnaires to the relevant subject team leaders for the first five GNVQs (Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, Leisure & Tourism and Manufacturing). Information relating to pilots of other GNVQs, or of Foundation awards, was not sought. One hundred and fifty-six responses were received for the general GNVQ Co-ordinator questionnaire — 86 from schools, 16 from sixth-form colleges, 51 from FE colleges and three from specialist institutions. Figure 1 summarises the make-up of this sample.

Figure 1

The main sample: institutions represented



The number of post-compulsory students enrolled at centres in the sample ranged from about 30 to over 10 000. When presented with a list of possible descriptors of institutional experience with vocational education, 82% of FE colleges described themselves as offering a 'very wide range of qualifications: more than five years' experience (several levels/subjects/awarding bodies)'; 83% of schools described themselves as offering 'two or more qualifications (e.g. BTEC Firsts and DVE; or BTEC Firsts + RSA Typing): more than 5 years' experience'. Twenty-five per cent of sixth-form colleges also chose this self-descriptor; however responses from VIth form colleges to this question were spread across the range of possibilities.

Figures from NCVQ based on awarding body returns indicate that the national breakdown of all centres registered to offer GNVQs in 1993-4 (1419) by type of institution is approximately 36% FE colleges, 57% schools, two per cent of sixth form colleges and five per cent miscellaneous (specialist institutions, prisons, etc.). This is very similar to the composition of our sample, except in regard to the figure for sixth form colleges. The discrepancy here arises because whereas we have treated sixth-form colleges as a distinct category, they have sometimes been classed together with FE colleges in data received by NCVQ.

* The first year pilot group was excluded, as suffering from questionnaire fatigue, but will be included in the 1994-5 phase of the study

The subject-specific questionnaires sent to GNVQ subject team leaders collected more detailed information on time allocation, perceptions of workload/standard, timetabling, etc. and are discussed elsewhere in this report. Response rates in each area were generally 50 to 60%.

Site visit data

A subsample of 42 centres was selected from the main sample for site visits. This subsample consists of 16 FE colleges, six sixth-form colleges and 20 schools, chosen to reflect as representative a spread of size, location and awarding body distribution as possible. Fifteen of these centres (seven general FE colleges, two comprehensive schools, a grant maintained grammar school, a county high school, a secondary school, two sixth-form colleges and a tertiary college) were visited before the end of the 1993-4 academic year.

Student data

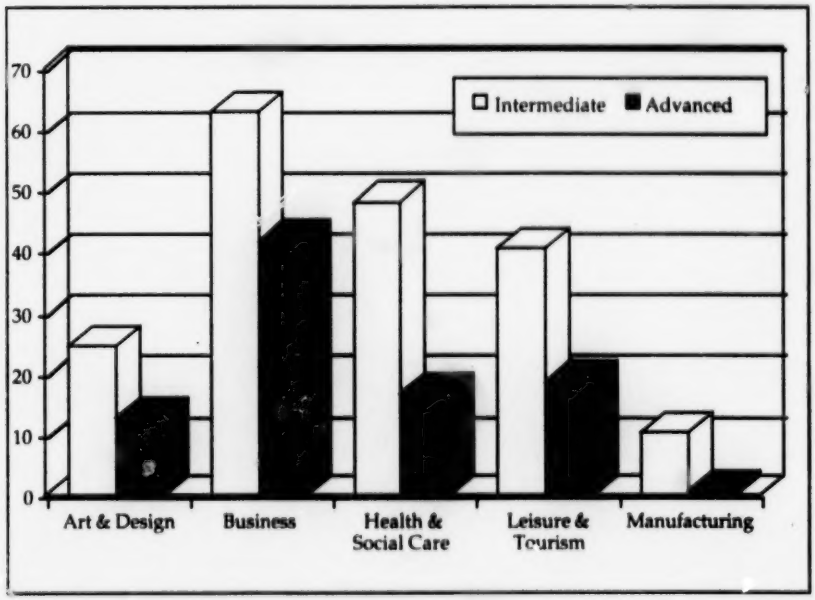
A questionnaire was sent to students at 82 centres — all of the centres in the site visit sample, plus another 40. The extra 40 consisted of 30 centres chosen from the main sample, together with ten selected at random from the list of original GNVQ pilot centres. Around 3000 student questionnaires were sent out. (Numbers sent to each centre were based on enrolment information provided by centres at the beginning of the 1993-4 year; but actual enrolments in June 1994 often turned out to be considerably lower.) 1103 valid responses were obtained from 53 centres (22 FE colleges, seven sixth-form colleges and 24 schools). It should be emphasised that although the majority of centres offering GNVQs are schools, FE colleges provide the bulk of student enrolment.

Relative take-up and distribution of GNVQs

Figure 2 indicates the percentages of centres in the sample offering GNVQs in each of the first five subject areas during 1993/4. In general, more centres were offering Intermediate GNVQs than Advanced. Business was the most popular GNVQ offered, in each type of institution; but whereas in FE and sixth form colleges roughly equal numbers of centres were offering Intermediate and Advanced Business GNVQs (59% Intermediate, 55% Advanced for FE colleges, 50% Intermediate, 50% Advanced for sixth forms), the Intermediate GNVQ was far the more popular with schools—67% of schools were offering it, compared with only 31% offering Advanced. Indeed, the relative numbers of schools offering Advanced GNVQs in any of the five vocational areas available were very much smaller than those for FE or sixth-form colleges — five per cent of schools offered Advanced Art & Design, , two per cent offered Health & Social Care and eight per cent offered Leisure & Tourism, in comparison with 19, 31 and 25 respectively for sixth-form colleges and 26, 37 and 33 for FE colleges. Advanced Manufacturing was reported as being offered by only one FE college in the sample, and by no sixth form colleges or schools.

Figure 2

Percentage of centres offering Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs 1993/4, by vocational area



Another area in which there are significant differences between schools and colleges is the choice of awarding body. Figure 3 shows the distribution of awarding bodies across the whole sample. (Centres generally stick with one awarding body for their entire Intermediate and Advanced GNVQ provision. Thus 'BTEC' in the figure means that BTEC is the awarding body for each GNVQ offered; centres which offer GNVQs with two or more awarding bodies are classed as 'mixed'.) Figure 4 breaks down awarding body distribution by school and FE college. Most FE colleges (88%) were offering only BTEC GNVQs; only 27% of schools were doing so. On the other hand, 46% of schools were offering exclusively City & Guilds programmes, in comparison with only five per cent of FE colleges. No colleges in this sample were offering only RSA GNVQs, although 23% of schools were.*

* The distribution of sampled institutions by awarding body is very close to that found for all 'first-year GNVQ centres' on the project's initial surveys, see p 12

Figure 3

Awarding body distribution across all institutions (main sample)

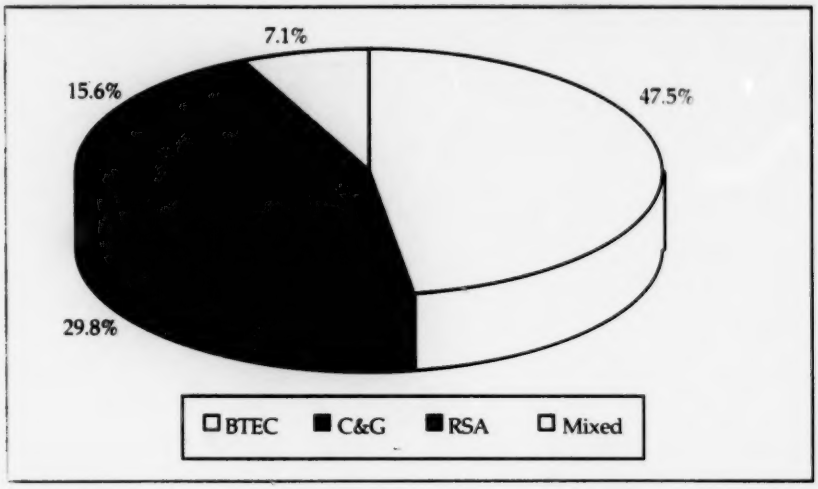
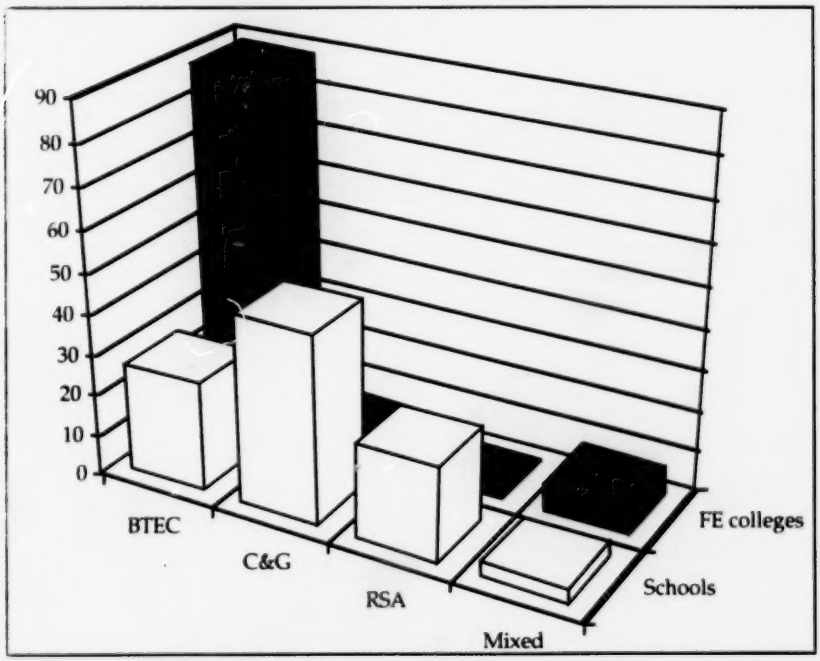


Figure 4

Comparison of awarding bodies: schools and FE colleges (main sample)



In summary, **FE colleges are predominantly BTEC centres, and on average provide a wider range of GNVQs. Schools are generally City & Guilds or RSA centres and are more likely to offer only Intermediate GNVQs (with the exception of Business). Sixth-form colleges seem to fall in between — relatively more of them offer Advanced GNVQs than schools and their distribution of awarding bodies is midway between that of schools and FE colleges (36% BTEC, 29% mixed, 21% RSA, 14% C&G).** However with full awarding body data for only 14 sixth-form colleges, care must be taken not to read too much into these figures.

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Figure 5 shows how the total reported student enrolment is distributed across institutions, and demonstrates that **the majority of students are to be found in FE colleges**. Figure 6 breaks this down further, and, for all centres in the main sample, shows the number of reported enrolments in May 1994 for each of the five subject areas surveyed, by type of institution.

Figure 5

Reported enrolments, May 1994, by institution (main sample)

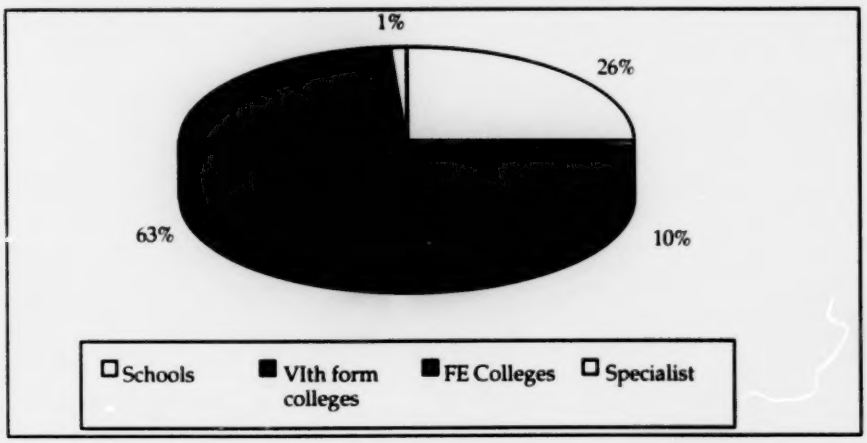
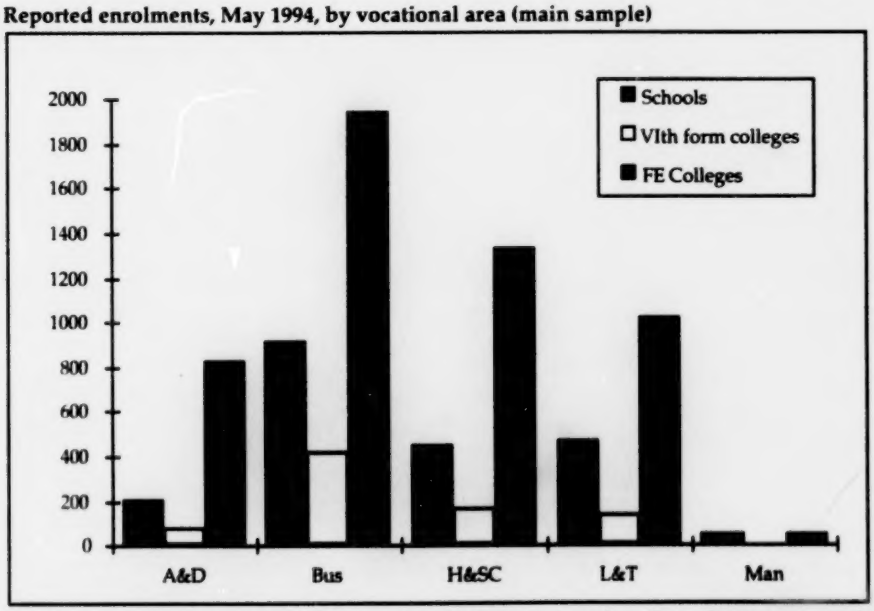


Figure 6

Reported enrolments, May 1994, by vocational area (main sample)



Relative enrolments for each GNVQ are given in Table 1, based on Co-ordinator returns for student numbers in the main sample (totals across Intermediate and Advanced) at May 1994. As indicated previously by Figure 2, Business has the largest enrolments and Manufacturing the smallest. The overall percentage distribution is very much in line with that given by the Further Education Funding Council (England) Inspectorate for total registrations in England for 1993-4*

* *General National Vocational Qualifications in the Further Education Sector in England*: National Survey Report, FEFC , November 1994

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Table 1

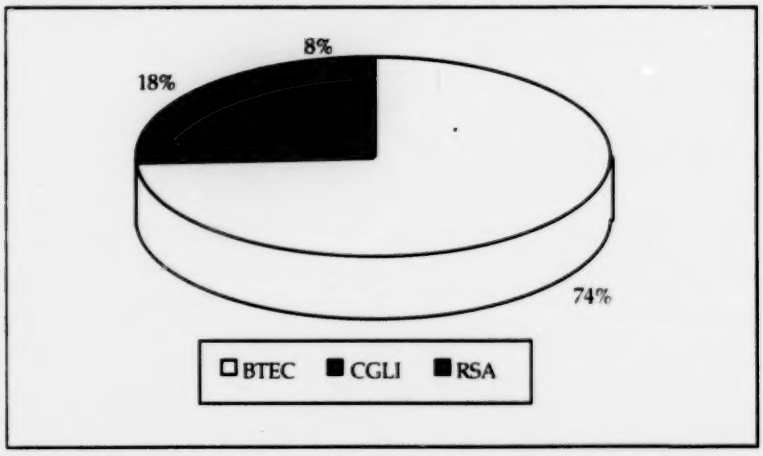
Distribution of reported enrolments between subjects, and between institutions by subject (main sample)

% of total GNVQ student enrolment	N		Percentage of students enrolled in different institutional sectors, by vocational area			
			Schools	VIth form colleges	FE colleges	Specialist institutions
14.1	1154	Art & Design	18	7	72	3
40.4	3298	Business	28	12	59	1
23.9	1952	Health & Social Care	23	9	68	0
20.3	1656	Leisure & Tourism	28	9	62	1
1.3	105	Manufacturing	52	0	48	0
	8165	Total	26	10	63	1

The approximate distribution of reported enrolments by awarding body is shown in Figure 7, which indicates that nearly three quarters of enrolments at centres in this sample are with BTEC. This is because, as has been observed, FE colleges provide the bulk of student numbers, and most FE colleges are BTEC centres.

Figure 7

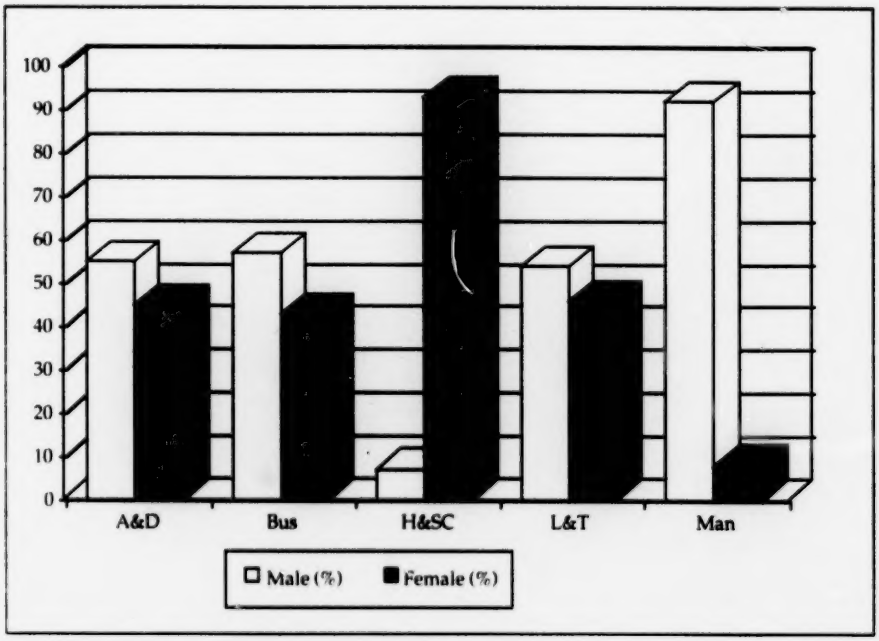
Reported enrolments by awarding body (main sample)



Gender information from the student questionnaire yields estimates of a GNVQ student population which is currently 52% female, 48% male. Gender breakdowns by subject are given in Figure 8. In Art & Design, Business & Leisure and Tourism men outnumbered women by six to ten percent. In Health & Social Care, on the other hand, 93% of respondents were female. 92% of Manufacturing respondents were male; absolute numbers for Manufacturing, however, were much lower than for the other subject areas.

Figure 8

Gender of respondents by subject area (student sample)



Drop-out and retention rates

Table 2 provides information on retention rates for the sample as a whole and for different types of institution.* Figures reflect differences between the numbers of students enrolled in October 1993 and numbers enrolled in May 1994. They indicate an average drop-out rate of around 20% for Intermediate students over what is normally delivered as a one-year course. Rates for Advanced students are for the first year of the course only. They are, for the sample as a whole, consistently below 20%, although there is some indication of differences between types of centre.

* At this point, detailed figures on success rates are not generally available. We will be collecting information on completion rates and grades for the student sample and will report on this in the next report. Approximate registrations for Intermediate GNVQs in 1993-4 and reported numbers gaining the full awards at Intermediate in the same year are included in Appendix IIB.

Table 2

Reported drop-out rates (main sample) based on reported enrolments at start of academic year and on 1 May 1994

(a) Average % drop-out: Intermediate GNVQs

	Schools	FE Colleges	VIth Form Colleges	**Total**
Art & Design	20	17	19	**18**
Business	17	21	11	**17**
Health & Social Care	24	19	15	**20**
Leisure & Tourism	22	25	17	**23**
Manufacturing	40	19	n/a	**28**

(b) Average % drop-out: Advanced GNVQs (Year 1 only)

	Schools	FE Colleges	VIth Form Colleges	**Total**
Art & Design	20	17	10	**17**
Business	14	19	10	**16**
Health & Social Care	22	15	16	**15**
Leisure & Tourism	20	21	13	**19**
Manufacturing	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

These figures are very much in line with those for vocational courses, as analysed by the Audit Commission in 1993.* The Commission's report indicated that non-completion rates averaged 18% for vocational courses, but with huge variations between courses and institutions. (There were also large variations in the percentage of unsuccessful completions.) Non-completion rates for BTEC First Diplomas in the Commission's sample appeared very close to those reported by our GNVQ sample. (Since our Advanced data cover only the first year of course, no exact comparisons are possible for BTEC National.)

* Audit commission *Unfinished Business: full-time Educational courses for 16-year olds* (HMSO 1993)

Centre rationale for introducing GNVQs

We found little evidence of centres introducing GNVQs because of intrinsic features of the awards or a well-researched preference for GNVQs over other qualifications: although this may change as GNVQs become better known and understood. Instead, one of two basic rationales was offered. In many centres GNVQs were introduced solely as direct replacements for either BTEC or City & Guilds analogues (essentially BTEC Firsts and Nationals and City & Guilds DVE/CPVE) because of the perception that this was government policy; that all centres would have to make the change at some point; and that there were advantages in starting now. Other centres had made the decision to introduce new vocational qualifications into the curriculum or to expand their vocational programmes into new vocational areas in order to attract more post-compulsory students or provide more alternatives within a rapidly expanding sixth form. GNVQs were selected in preference to older awards because the latter were clearly being phased out. In some cases, GNVQs were also perceived as easier to deliver, requiring fewer specialist resources as a condition for awarding body approval.

Table 3 summarises the percentages in the main sample who reported GNVQs to be new ventures, or replacement qualifications. (Please note that these figures refer to individual GNVQ courses. A given institution may have both 'replacement' and 'new venture' GNVQs on offer.) As one might predict, there are clear differences between sectors. FE colleges have largely used GNVQs to replace existing qualifications; schools, which are able to offer GNVQs with a freedom they had not traditionally enjoyed with vocational awards, are mostly using them as part of an expansion of their vocational programme; and sixth form colleges fall between the other two groups. It is also apparent from this table that **GNVQs are not, at present, being used to replace either GCE A levels or NVQs.**

Table 3

Extent to which GNVQs replaced existing awards

See Appendix II for detailed figures by vocational area and level

	Schools	VIth Form Colleges	FE Colleges
New venture	72%	53%	31%
Replacement:			
BTEC (First or National)	3%	23%	53%
DVE/CPVE	18%	12%	3%
A Level	0.5%	2% (N = 1)	0.5% (N = 1)
NVQ	–	–	0.5% (N = 1)
Other (inc. unspecified)	6.5%	10%	12%

Evidence from the site visits

Further information on the rationale behind centres' decisions to introduce GNVQs during 1993-4 was obtained from the case study visits carried out during the late spring and early summer (1994).

Introducing GNVQs as a direct replacement for BTEC or City and Guilds analogues

In thirteen out of the fifteen centres some or all of the GNVQs offered were BTEC re-specifications or introduced primarily as a consequence of City & Guilds withdrawing the Diploma in Vocational Education (DVE) in favour of GNVQs. Not surprisingly this pattern was most evident among those centres with significant experience of vocational qualifications — mainly colleges of further education.

This rationale informed the centres' choice of GNVQ titles and level. The decision on when to replace existing provision with GNVQs had been taken following advice from awarding bodies that the pre GNVQ qualifications were about to be phased out. Where centres were introducing GNVQs only because the awarding body was planning to withdraw existing qualifications there was a marked tendency for the centre to introduce those GNVQs which were closest in scope and content to the analogues being replaced. This is one reason why GNVQs in Manufacturing were not popular among these centres.

Many staff in centres which had adopted GNVQs for this reason were ambivalent on whether Advanced GNVQs were an improvement on the qualifications they replaced. They were not clear about what had been gained by the change. There were questions as to whether Advanced GNVQs could provide a satisfactory replacement for all current BTEC National courses. (See box and section on 'How far are GNVQs displacing vocational provision?'.) **At Intermediate level, by contrast, very few staff regretted the passing of BTEC First or DVE, of which there were many criticisms**. However, some were not convinced that Intermediate GNVQs were appropriate for all the students who traditionally had taken BTEC Firsts or DVE, and felt this was causing and might continue to cause problems. (This issue is also discussed in later sections.)

Replacing older vocational qualifications: Evidence from case-study centres

Most centres were content that the Advanced GNVQs in Business and Art & Design were adequate replacements for the BTEC National Diplomas in Business & Finance and General Art & Design. However, centres did not believe that the GNVQs could replace the more specialised VQs, including the more specialised BTEC National Diplomas, available in these two vocational areas. This was especially the case in the Art & Design sector. Nor were NVQs thought to be suitable as replacements. As one college put it: 'Although we expected all vocational qualifications to be eventually replaced by either NVQs or GNVQs we now believe that much of our vocational provision cannot be replaced by either.

In Health & Social Care and Leisure & Tourism, centres pointed out that all the older VQs had been more specialised or focused than the new GNVQs. Centres were faced with the prospect of (or requirement to) replace a number of more specialised, and well established and valued, VQs with a single title. Centres with no background or experience in these two sectors did not raise these concerns. For them the very broad nature of the GNVQs meant that they could deploy a variety of staff, rather than have to employ specialists, and recruit a range of students with only vague aspirations in the vocation.

Introducing GNVQs coincidentally with the decision to offer vocational qualifications (or significantly expand the vocational qualification offer)

Not surprisingly the majority of centres falling into this category were schools (with some sixth-form colleges) and these centres tended to offer Intermediate GNVQs in preference to Advanced GNVQs. Similarly these centres were more likely to offer those GNVQs which could be considered analogous to National Curriculum subjects. Although nationally most centres offering GNVQs in 1993-4 had some vocational or pre-vocational experience, in some the introduction of GNVQs was associated with the decision to **start** offering something broadly vocational and designed for full time study by 16-year-old students. Some centres had spare capacity and were offering one or more GNVQs alongside their main post-16 programme. Overall, the case studies suggested that there may, over time, be some significant replacement of GCSE resits by GNVQs: and we propose to monitor this over the next year.

Even in cases where the centre was new to VQs, GNVQs had not always been the centre's first choice. The decision to offer GNVQs (as opposed to BTEC, DVE, RSA, VQs, etc.) was often taken on purely pragmatic grounds (often because the awarding body had told the centre that there was no alternative to the GNVQ).

GNVQs: Evidence from case-study centres

One centre, upon deciding to offer VQs, had applied to offer CPVE/DVE but had been told that GNVQs had replaced CPVE/DVE. Similarly another had been looking for something which could be delivered 'well' with high success rates — to contribute to league table success — which would attract students and parents (keen on academic achievement) and which would not damage the centre's grammar school image. Offering BTEC First, probably in a partnership with a college, was considered as the first option but eventually the centre decided to offer GNVQs, at least partly because a partnership with a local college would then not be needed.

General issues

There is little evidence of centres choosing GNVQs because of a definite preference for them over other vocational or pre-vocational awards. While the implementation of GNVQs might in some cases be used to spearhead other changes within a centre, their introduction was a response either to awarding body (or rather government) policy on what qualifications to offer or to more general changes in the post-16 'market'. In addition it was apparent (and understandable) that most centres had only a partial knowledge of GNVQs when they decided to offer them. This meant that few colleges were able to arrive at an informed preference for GNVQs.

Similarly the choice of awarding body seemed to have been made on a fairly arbitrary basis. However, there was a marked tendency for colleges with VQ experience to choose BTEC and centres new to VQs to choose C&G or RSA Examining Board. Decisions were made, at best, pragmatically and so as to deviate from past or existing practice as little as possible.

None of this is surprising, given how new the awards were at the time when decisions were made. However, it is disturbing that there was little evidence of any significant planning of the introduction of GNVQs preceding their introduction into the curriculum. Staff often commented on how little they knew in advance about course delivery, assessment requirements and methods, etc. We found no indication that the current (1994-5) year will be significantly different in this respect, although there will, of course, be more institutional experience available.

WHO IS TAKING GNVQS? AND WHAT COURSES ARE THEY COMBINING WITH GNVQS?

Schools and colleges, on a sectoral basis if not always individually, are in the business of offering courses to the whole of their prospective student population. As might be expected, and as the previous section will already have indicated, this creates **a natural tendency to aim GNVQs at particular segments of the student population, defined in academic terms:** and this is indeed what is happening.

This section reports in some detail on the findings of our student questionnaires which, as described above, were completed by 1103 students in 53 centres. Figures 9 and 10 below summarise the type of centre from which student data were collected, and the distribution of students across centre types. Comparison with Figures 1 and 5 (above) indicates that the student sample reflects the national distribution quite closely in terms of both centre type and student enrolment patterns.

Figure 9

The student sample: institutions sampled

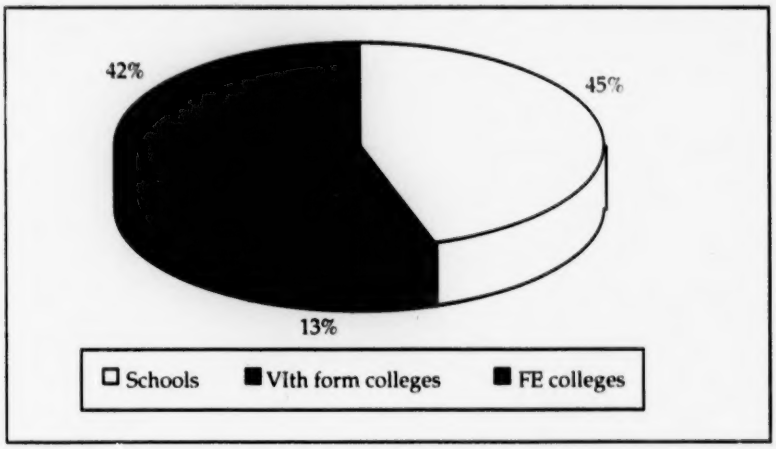
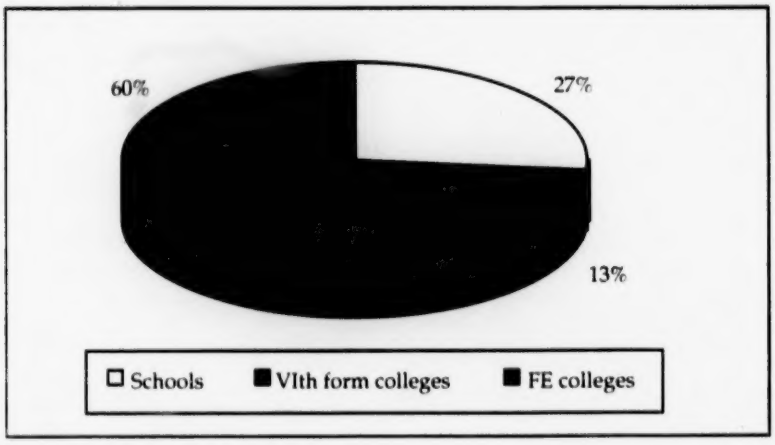


Figure 10

The student sample: distribution across institutions



Data from the student sample provide a detailed profile of Advanced and Intermediate enrolments in terms of prior academic achievement and future plans. As the previous section noted, **Advanced GNVQs are treated to a large extent as a replacement qualification for an already existing 'market', that for BTEC National.** This is reflected in high levels of agreement on who 'appropriate' candidates are, and how entry onto the course should be defined. The student data show that there is nonetheless a considerable disparity between the target and the actual student population for these awards. **In the case of Intermediate GNVQs, the 'market segment' is, to date, far less clearly defined,** and in a state of continuing flux, and this is reflected in the student data. For both Intermediate and Advanced groups, the questionnaires revealed very high educational aspirations which it may prove difficult for the educational system (and the students) to fulfil but which embody a major shift in young people's behaviour and attitudes.

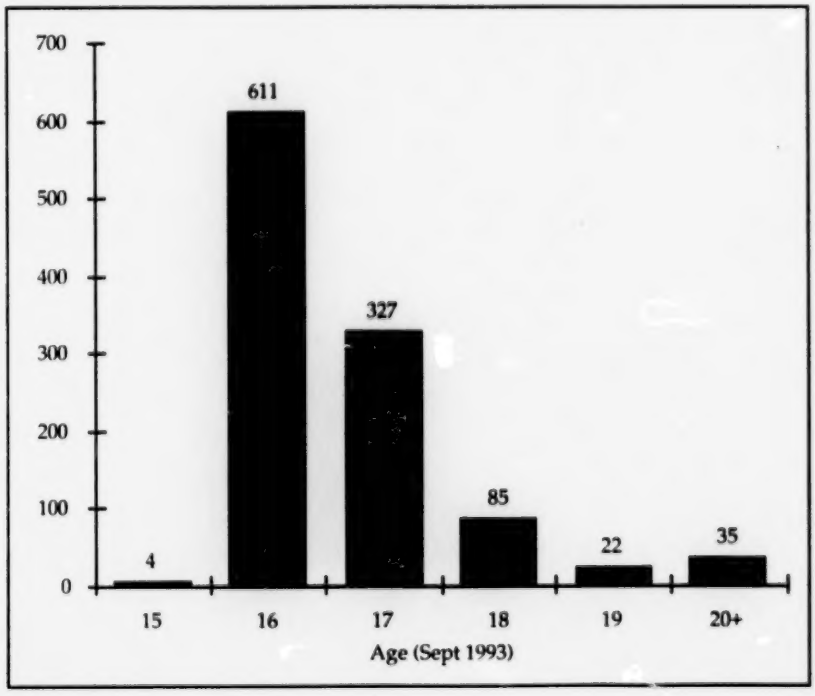
Student characteristics

The data from the student questionnaires cover students who were still following their courses in the second part of the summer term, 1994. Students who had dropped out earlier in the year are not included.

As shown in Figure 11, **the overwhelming majority — 97% — of GNVQ students are aged 19 and under.** Fifty-six per cent are aged 16; 30% are 17 years old. Of those few students who are aged 20 or over, 40% are in Art and Design courses. Almost all (85%) of these older students are following Advanced courses rather than Intermediate (compared to 54% of the sample as a whole). Students are also, at present, overwhelmingly full-time. Government policy makers have been concerned to determine whether GNVQs are suitable for part-time students, including adults at work although their main target group remains full-time students. In our sample, only 2.4% described themselves as part-time students but there was no indication from the existing data whether this had anything to do with the structure of GNVQs. We will investigate this in more detail in the 1994-5 survey. The age distribution of this small part-time group was the same as for the sample as a whole.

Figure 11

Age distribution of respondents to student questionnaire (n = 1084)



Ninety-five per cent of the students had entered their GNVQ course directly from full-time education (in school or college). The five per cent of whom this was not the case almost without exception returned to studying full-time when they enrolled on the GNVQ course.

In Table 4 and Figures 12 and 13 we summarise the prior qualifications of students entering GNVQ courses in autumn 1993. Further details are provided in Appendix II.

Table 4

Percentage of Advanced and Intermediate GNVQ students gaining GCSEs at grade C and above (student sample)

	Intermediate (N = 505)		Advanced (N = 597)	
Number of GCSE awards at C or above	%	Cumulative %	%	Cumulative %
0	33	33	9	9
1	28	61	10	19
2	18	79	13	32
3	12	91	17	49
4	4	95	15	64
5	3	98	15	79
6	1	99	10	89
7+	1	100	11	100

Figure 12

Average numbers of GCSEs grades A-C and A-D achieved by Intermediate GNVQ students, by centre type

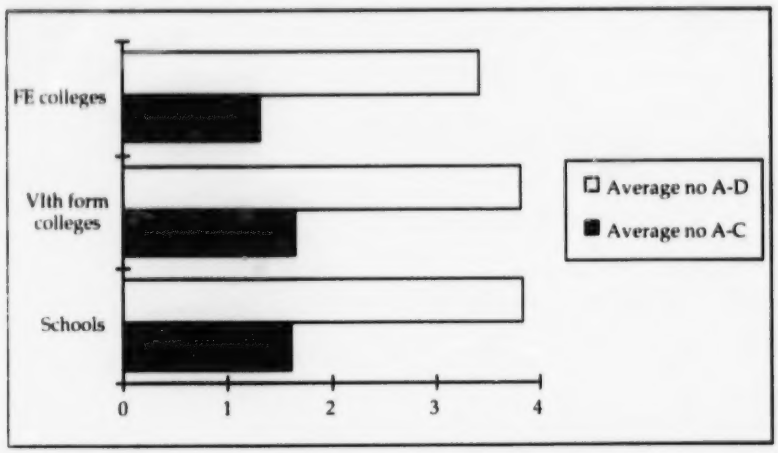
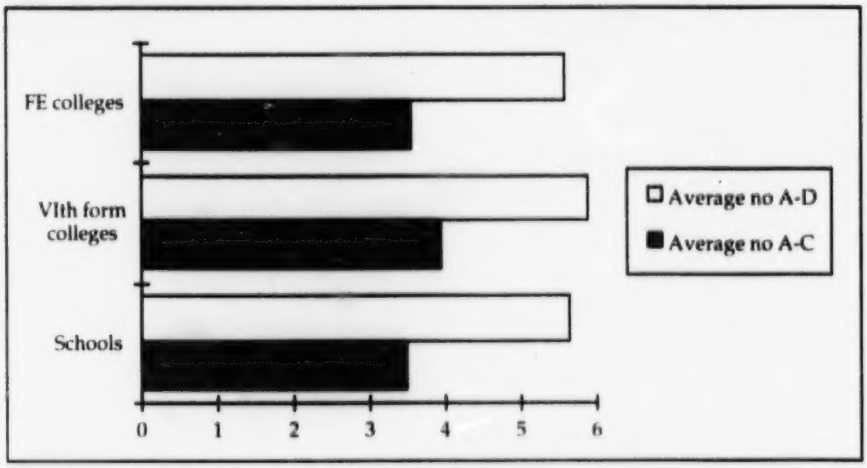


Figure 13

Average number of GCSEs grades A–C and A–D achieved by Advanced GNVQ students, by centre type



As might be expected, there are major differences between Intermediate and Advanced students in prior GCSE grades. Table 4 shows that **only nine per cent of the Intermediate group have more than three GCSEs at C or above; whereas 51% of the Advanced group do so**. However, it is also evident that there is a very wide spread of prior qualifications, and considerable overlap between the two groups. **Almost a fifth of the Advanced group, as well as three-fifths of the Intermediate, report one or no GCSEs at grade C or above**; while roughly the same proportion of Intermediate students report the 'modal' entry level for Advanced courses of 3 or more Cs. This may reflect a lack of clarity about the awards' standard (discussed further below), or simply pressure to fill places in the first year of GNVQs. We will be collecting comparable data during the next academic year, and comparing recruitment patterns overall and within institutions.

Figures 12 and 13 display further information on prior qualifications: average number of GCSEs at C or above, and at D or above, *by centre type*. At Advanced level, students in sixth form colleges display slightly higher GCSE grades; while at Intermediate level, those in FE colleges have somewhat lower GCSE grades than students in the other two sectors. However, the differences are rather smaller than the 'conventional wisdom' might suggest. Respondents in our case study sites generally emphasised the greater selectivity of schools and sixth form colleges, as compared to FE colleges. While this may be the case for sixth form colleges — and our sample here is small — it is less obviously so for schools.

As noted before, the data discussed here apply only to centres which offered GNVQs for the first time in 1993-4. Figures 14 and 15 provide a comparison between the results for the student sample from these centres and those for NCVQ's study of pilot centres. At Intermediate level, there are few major differences, although the Health & Social Care group in our study has higher grades than in the pilot centres: but at Advanced level, GCSE grades for our second phase sample are consistently lower than for the NCVQ study. These tables also indicate that at present, **there are no significant differences in the general academic profile of entrants to different GNVQ subject areas**.

Figure 14

Comparison of Intermediate students' prior qualifications: this study (1993-4)and NCVQ study of pilot centres (1992-3)

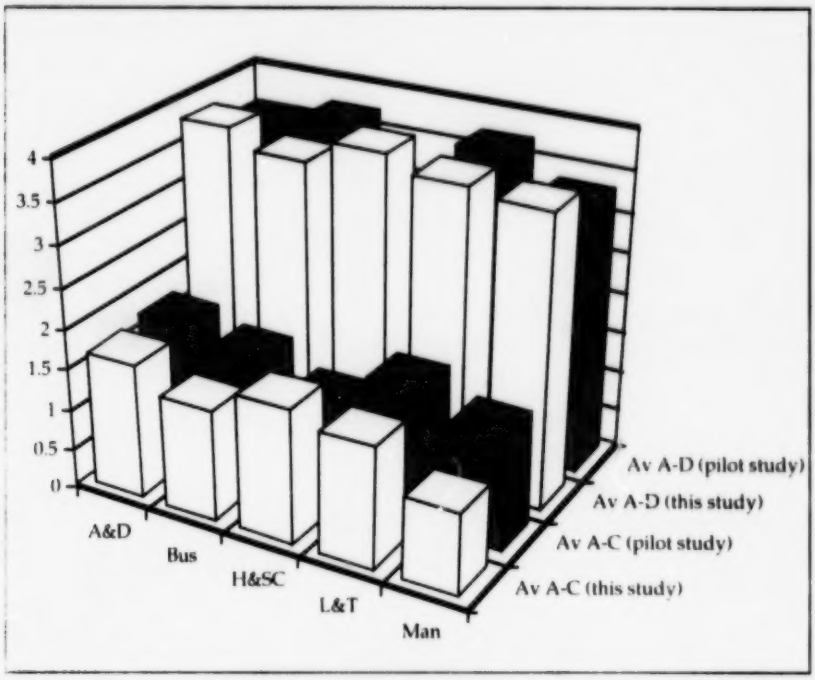
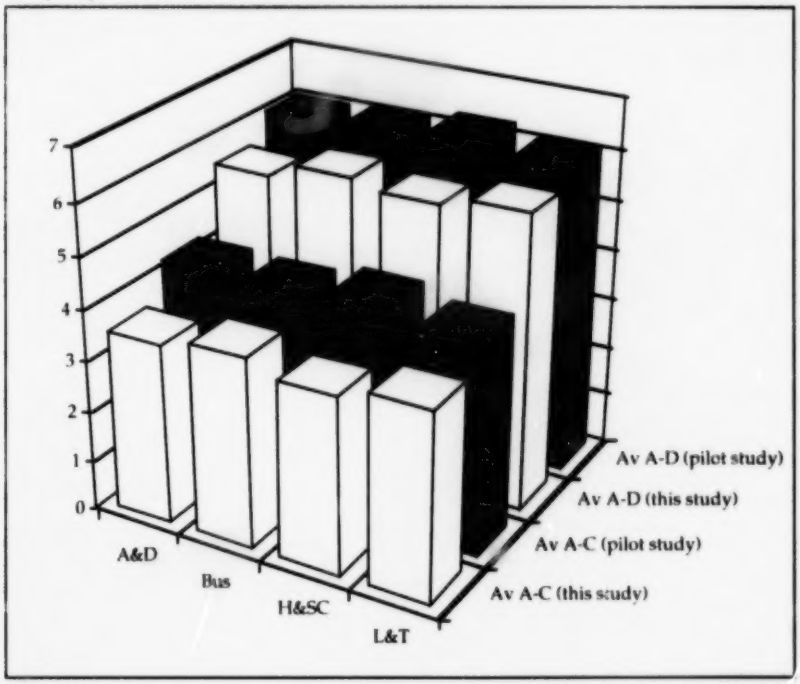


Figure 15

Comparison of Advanced students' prior qualifications: this study (1993-4) and NCVQ study of pilot centres (1992-3)



The data presented up to this point have made no distinction between students of different ages. As noted above, the vast majority (95%) enter their GNVQ courses from elsewhere in full-time education: but within the Advanced student group there are nonetheless two distinct patterns of entry. Half the Advanced students in the sample began their Advanced GNVQ courses straight after their GCSEs, but the other half did not. 35% 'deferred' by a year, while 15% took their GCSEs more than a year before starting their Advanced GNVQ.*

Table 5

Qualifications of 'immediate' (column 2) and 'deferred' (columns 3 and 4) entry Advanced students

	All Advanced students (n = 597)	Those taking GCSEs in 1993 (n = 277)	Those taking GCSEs in 1992 (n = 191)	Those taking GCSEs before 1992 (n = 83)
% obtaining ≥5 A-C	35.1	46.9	25.7	32.5
% obtaining ≥4 A-C	50.1	65.7	34.0	47.0
% obtaining ≥4 A-C, including Maths or English	48.2	63.5	33.0	43.4
% obtaining ≥4 A-C, including ≥C in English	45.6	59.9	31.9	43.4
% obtaining ≥4 A-C including ≥C in Maths	31.3	42.2	22.5	22.9

As Table 5 demonstrates, the GCSE profiles of these groups differ markedly. Those students who start an Advanced GNVQ straight after their GCSEs have significantly higher grades, with around two-thirds achieving 4 or more A-C grades, and almost half achieving 5 or more A-C grades. The group who took their GCSEs in 1992 have a GCSE profile much closer to that for Intermediate students, and the single most common activity for such students in the year prior to course entry was to take a BTEC First. Forty-one per cent of students 'deferring' entry to Advanced GNVQs for one year had obtained a BTEC First Diploma. Progression on to a BTEC National via a BTEC First or DVE/CPVE has been common for a number of years, though we have no figures on how many National students enter by this route. However, it is striking that, in the very first non-pilot year of Advanced GNVQs, so many students should have followed it. Readers will note that the 15% of students who took GCSEs before 1992 have GCSE grade profiles falling between the other two groups. We do not have sufficient data to explain this pattern but we do know that 22% of these students had a BTEC First Diploma. We will be investigating this issue further in the next stage of the survey.

As discussed further below, the aspirations of current Intermediate students indicate that this pattern will continue to be extremely important. It is also one which is quite different from that followed in compulsory education in the UK, where 'automatic promotion' is the rule: students do not normally repeat years, or take differing amounts of time to reach a given milestone (such as GCSE or key stage 3 tests.) It is more commonly associated with countries such as France or Germany, where students frequently repeat years, and are, especially at higher levels, very keen to do so in order to secure examination success and progression.

Table 6 provides some information about Advanced students' prior performance in the key GCSE subjects of English, Maths or Science. Of the three, English shows the 'best' profile, with GNVQ students obtaining results which are better than those of the 1993 GCSE cohort as a whole. Science and Maths results are much weaker. Very few students have obtained grades A or B in Maths or Science: when compared with the profile for the whole age cohort, the difference between these results and those for English are striking. Once again, results are higher for the group who took their GCSE examinations in 1993: but they also contain very few students with A or B grades in Maths or Science.

* Strictly speaking, of course, it was not a GNVQ that was deferred since GNVQs only became available in 1993.

Table 6

Comparison of selected GCSE grades of GCSE cohort as a whole with GNVQ Advanced students

	All GCSE candidates 1993 (England and Wales) %	GNVQ Advanced (all) %	GNVQ Advanced students who took GCSEs in 1993 %	GNVQ Advanced students who took GCSEs prior to 1993 %
Maths				
A	8.5	1.3	1.9	0.8
B	10.3	5.2	6.3	3.9
C	26.5	35.8	44.2	28.1
D	19.2	28.0	27.9	27.7
lower than D	35.5	29.7	19.7	39.5
English*				
A	10.1	1.9	2.1	1.9
B	18.6	14.9	17.4	14.1
C	28.4	53.0	57.7	47.2
D	21.6	23.2	18.1	27.5
lower	21.3	7.0	4.6	9.3
Science (double award)				
A	10.6	1.4	1.2	1.8
B	12.8	6.4	7.8	3.9
C	22.8	29.9	36.2	23.7
D	19.2	32.5	30.5	36.0
lower	34.6	29.0	24.3	34.6

** For candidates reporting two English grades, the English Language result is used.*

Official entry criteria used with GNVQs

The previous section describes the prior qualifications of our student sample. However, we also collected information on the entry criteria set by centre staff. These reflect a combination of what actually occurs and what staff would like to occur — since if courses are popular, entry criteria will tend to become more stringent in practice than in theory, while when there are problems filling places, the opposite will occur. Official entry criteria also, however, have a substantial effect on people's perceptions of a qualification and therefore on what that qualification actually becomes over time.

The data reported here are taken from responses by GNVQ subject team leaders for the different areas, rather than from questionnaires to centre-level GNVQ coordinators. At centre level there is a tendency in many cases to assert that the policy is one of 'open enrolment'. While this may be true in the sense that no-one is officially precluded from entry onto any course, it is not, in our experience, a very helpful guide to actual enrolment policy.

Table 7 summarises the information on GNVQ entry criteria provided by GNVQ subject team leaders in the full survey sample. These criteria reflect the perception that staff have of the difficulty of GNVQs, and of the place Intermediate and Advanced occupy in post-16 education, and the way they conceive of the courses in their recruitment, delivery, and advice to students.

Table 7

(a) Official centre criteria for admission to Intermediate GNVQ courses (main sample)

	A&D	Bus.	H&SC	L&T	Manuf	Total
No formal requirements	23.3	25.6	24.7	26.7	27.3	24.0
4 C/D, including Maths and English	2.7	6.0	5.2	5.8	12.1	5.7
4 C/D, any subjects	5.5	6.0	5.2	5.8	6.1	5.7
Lower GCSEs	31.5	40.2	42.3	38.4	21.2	37.3
Portfolio/RoA	21.6	2.6	2.1	3.5	6.1	6.4
References	6.8	6.9	3.1	4.7	6.1	5.5
Interview	9.6	10.3	12.4	13.9	24.2	12.6
Foundation GNVQ/DVE/ CPVE	2.7	6.0	6.2	7.0	3.0	5.4
'Evidence of literacy and numeracy'	4.1	6.0	5.2	4.7	0	4.7

(b) Official centre criteria for admission to Advanced GNVQ courses (main sample)*

	A&D	Bus.	H&SC	L&T	Total
No formal requirements	6.1	1.9	2.7	3.9	3.5
At least 4 Cs, including Maths and English	6.1	12.4	8.1	6.5	8.7
At least 4 Cs, any subject	59.1	61.9	67.6	67.5	63.9
4 C/D, including Maths and English	1.5	1.9	1.4	2.6	1.9
4 C/D, any subjects	9.1	7.6	8.2	5.2	7.5
Other GCSE	1.5	6.9	5.6	5.2	5.0
BTEC/GNVQ Int, Merit or Distinction	7.5	4.8	4.1	5.2	5.3
BTEC/GNVQ Int, unspecified grade	27.2	27.6	29.8	23.4	27.0
Portfolio/RoA	18.2	1.0	0	1.3	4.6
Interview	1.5	1.0	1.4	1.3	1.3
Other	9.1	9.6	6.8	10.4	9.0

** Manufacturing omitted: Advanced entry criteria available for only one centre.*

Answers may sum to more than 100%: multiple responses were possible.
"Interview" = acceptance solely on the basis of interview

* In both a and b, answers may sum to 100%: multiple responses were possible. Interviews equals acceptance solely on the basis of interview

The criteria for Intermediate GNVQ entry reflect some of the current confusion about the nature and standard of Intermediate GNVQs, and also pressure to fill courses in the first year of offering the award. Around a quarter of centres currently have no formal entry requirements at all but it seems likely from the case study findings that this percentage will drop markedly in the next year or so. At the other end of the scale, a number of institutions are demanding entry criteria for Intermediate GNVQs which are more commonly associated with Advanced entry: 4 C/D grades or even 4 C/D including Maths and English. Easily the most common requirement is, however, a 'lower' GCSE-based entry requirement. This has proven very difficult to summarise since it varies very markedly from centre to centre, both in the language used and in the number of GCSE 'points' required.

At Advanced level, by comparison, there seems to be considerable national agreement on the modal entry level of appropriate GNVQ students. Far and away the most common entry requirement asked for is 'At least four Cs in any subject'. This is also very much the entry level historically associated with BTEC National: whereas for GCE A-level entry, the usual requirement is four or five GCSEs at C or above, including Maths and English.

The Advanced entry criteria also highlight one of the rapidly emerging patterns in GNVQ provision: namely the degree to which GNVQs are seen to offer a clear progression route starting at Intermediate level. As discussed further below, very large numbers of Intermediate candidates expect to take Advanced GNVQs, and it seems likely that this will become increasingly common. Around a third of our centres, one year into GNVQ provision, explicitly cite (lower) BTEC/GNVQ certificates as acceptable criteria for Advanced GNVQ study. Most of these centres do not demand Merit or Distinction grades (but see below). As noted above, half of current Advanced GNVQ students pursued other studies after GCSE, before starting their GNVQ. It is unclear how much relevance was attached to the different qualification the students had. We do not know whether the decision to accept those students onto Advanced GNVQ course was influenced more by their GCSE grades or their other qualifications.

In a number of our case study centres, senior staff nonetheless expressed concern about the degree to which many Intermediate students are in fact equipped for an Advanced course. These staff noted that despite official criteria which do not cite Merit or Distinction grades, in practice, they would want only to consider those with a Merit or Distinction awarded with respect to quality of work. If this becomes the practice, especially in centres which can be fairly selective about their Advanced entry, then a) progression routes for qualifying Intermediate students and b) the comparability of standards for Merit and Distinction awards at Intermediate will become important issues in the near future.

We would also emphasise two other findings. First, **there are few major differences between subjects in entry criteria** other than the emphasis of Art & Design on portfolio work as a criterion for acceptance: just as we found no significant difference in students' actual academic profiles. (The 'no formal requirement' category for Art & Design courses will generally also refer to portfolio-based procedures.) While a hierarchy may emerge for GNVQs — as it has for GCE A levels to some degree, and as exists very clearly for the French technical and vocational bacs. — it is not evident here. Second, **there is no mention of NVQs as an entry criterion**, and industrial experience is mentioned as an entry qualification/criterion for Advanced entry by only *one* centre in the whole sample (which cites it for all four vocational areas surveyed.)

Formal and actual entry criteria compared

Comparison of the formal entry criteria with the actual prior qualifications of our student sample suggests that, in the first year at least, centres were consistently accepting large numbers of Advanced level students who fell short of their preferred entry level. (NCVQ's data from the pilot centres in 1992-3 shows average prior qualifications which are rather higher than ours for Advanced students, but which also indicate substantial numbers falling below the four Cs cut-off.) We have not yet compared the prior qualifications of our student sample with those of their own particular institutions, so the degree to which this occurred at individual centre level is not yet clear. What is clear is that 49% of our Advanced level student sample (who were completing their first year) had GCSE results at entry which were lower than the 'consensus' level of four Cs — a level which is given further legitimacy by the formal equivalences established for Intermediate and GCSE.

Evidence from the site visits

Further information on the way staff conceptualise Advanced and Intermediate GNVQs, and the way this translates into formal entry qualifications was obtained from the case study visits carried out during the late spring and early summer of 1994.

Official entry criteria for GNVQs

All centres visited responded immediately to questions on their official entry criteria in terms of GCSE grades, reflecting both prior practice and the nature of GNVQ applicants, the majority of whom are coming direct from GCSE courses.

Entry criteria for Advanced GNVQs: case studies

All ten of the site visit centres which were already offering Advanced GNVQs agreed on 4 Cs as a 'minimum' for entry to Advanced GNVQs. However two general FE colleges stipulated that the four GCSEs at grade C must include GCSE English and Maths and two other centres (one general FE college and a sixth form college) emphasised that 4 GCSEs at grade C was an absolute minimum and that successful applicants would be expected to offer better grades/more passes. One centre, which had used largely non-academic criteria for entry to the Advanced GNVQ in Art & Design had decided, reluctantly, to change because the staff now realised that the GNVQ was not a 'non academic' programme/qualification, but required conventional academic skills. This centre considered that Advanced GNVQ Art and Design was 'more academic' than Art GCE A level.

All said that in principle they would accept students with BTEC First or Intermediate GNVQ onto Advanced GNVQ programmes; and, as described above, this is already a common occurrence. However, in our interviews, most staff expressed some considerable caution on this. Three centres said that they would be very cautious; one centre said that a student with an Intermediate GNVQ obtained in a school would not necessarily be accepted onto a college Advanced GNVQ programme; and one sixth form college was of the opinion that, while they would be cautious about accepting their own Intermediate students onto an Advanced course, FE colleges would almost certainly do so!

The formal qualifications cited were in response to both the perceived demands of the Advanced qualification and the place of Advanced GNVQ in the overall 'qualification hierarchy'. Four Cs was the traditional entry level for BTEC National Diplomas — although it may be that here, too, many students were in fact accepted with lower grades. It may also be that, as GNVQs become more established, the modal level of entry will rise: — most centres reported problems filling their GNVQ courses in the autumn of 1993, and the 1994 entry may be more carefully selected. If not, there may be serious problems for course delivery. If the high degree of consensus on formal entry qualifications reflects consensus on the level and difficulty of the course, then many Advanced GNVQ students, entering without the relevant prior qualifications, may be unable to complete the qualification successfully.

As noted earlier, there was a clear consensus that not all Intermediate GNVQ or BTEC First students could progress to Advanced GNVQ course in a trouble-free way. The caution on accepting BTEC First can be explained by the general view that the BTEC First is delivered at varying but generally low levels. However, virtually all centres reckon that Intermediate GNVQ is harder than BTEC First: so the caution here requires further elaboration, and has serious implications for the supposed equivalence between Intermediate and GCSEs. Intermediate awards were originally described as being 'comparable in their demands to 4 GCSEs at grades A–C (NCVQ *GNVQ Criteria and Guidance*) The DFE information note on GNVQs (*GNVQs: A brief guide*, DFE 8/93) states that Intermediate GNVQs are 'equivalent to four or five GCSEs at grades A–C' and more recently it has become common to align them with five GCSEs at grades A–C. There is thus an apparent contradiction between the willingness of the centres to accept students with 4 GCSEs at grade C (or less) onto an Advanced programme while proposing to turn down students with Intermediate GNVQs which, it is claimed, are all equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades A–C. There is an obvious explanation for this but it calls into question the reliability of the alignment and/or the transparency and consistency of the Intermediate award's standards.

Entry criteria for Intermediate GNVQs: case studies

The great disparity of entry criteria in use for Intermediate GNVQs is shown by the following case studies. In one centre the co-ordinator reported that a student with five GCSEs at grade C had been recruited to an Intermediate GNVQ (although the centre's official criteria was four GCSEs at grade E). At the other end of the spectrum one centre had recruited three students with learning difficulties on to an Intermediate GNVQ in Health & Social Care. Yet another asked only for students to be able to 'construct simple sentences and write a short letter' before offering them a place on an Intermediate GNVQ, while another was content to recruit students to Intermediate programmes with unclassified GCSE grades. However, centres who had set entry criteria less than 4 D grades at GCSE were almost unanimous in planning to revise their criteria for September 1994 entry. One co-ordinator said that he thought the 'open access policy' used for recruitment to Intermediate GNVQs had led to: 'my worst fall out ever — just awful' while two centres which had been open access intended to move to a formal requirement of D/E grades. One of these centres, commenting on the change in entry criteria, said: 'NCVQ say 'You want 4 Ds' — and that's crazy — you'd never get it. But I do want one or two Ds. I also want evidence from the NRA [National Record of Achievement] of attendance, punctuality, application.'

Actual entry qualifications and official entry criteria at Intermediate level would seem to be more closely aligned at present than for Advanced students. However, our case study centres were generally agreed on the need to rethink their Intermediate entry requirements. What seems to have happened is that many — even most — had included in their first cohort some students who fell short of the minimum: and were agreed that Intermediate was simply not suitable for these students.

While there seems to be an emerging consensus that a sizeable proportion of 16/17 year olds are not able to cope with Intermediate GNVQs, there remains considerable confusion about what the level/difficulty of the award is meant to be. This confusion emerges from both our questionnaire and our case-study data: and a recent FEU study on Intermediate GNVQs produces similar conclusions.*

Who are the target groups for GNVQs?

The target populations for GNVQ courses at Advanced and Intermediate level have not, up to now, been very clear. On the one hand, there has been a major effort to promote Advanced GNVQs as an alternative to GCE A levels, with the Secretary of State for Education in 1993 suggesting that they should be called 'vocational A level's, and great attention paid to their role as a route into higher education. This would tend to suggest that their target population is seen as overlapping with that for GCE A levels, and indeed is recruited in part (or indeed large part) from students who might otherwise do GCE A levels. At the same time, the target population for Intermediate awards has been much less clear. A recruitment system whereby Advanced GNVQs accepted only students who might otherwise do GCE A levels, and Intermediate courses absorbed all other GNVQ entrants would imply huge variations in the prior academic achievements and likely future pathways of Intermediate students. While the introduction of Foundation awards increases the choice for non-Advanced students, it nonetheless seems unlikely that many older students will opt for Foundation awards.

In practice, Advanced GNVQ cohorts have up to now been markedly different from GCE A-level ones. This difference is summarised in Table 8, comparing GCSE point totals of the two groups. **While there is some overlap, the GCE A level population** is drawn mostly from the 'top' group of students in terms of GCSE results and the GNVQ Advanced population from the 'middle' range of GCSE achievement.**

* Intermediate GNVQs Standards. FE Staff Perceptions unpublished. FEU 1994

** Source. DFE 7/94

Table 8

Percentage of students obtaining GCSE point totals

	GCE A-level candidates 1992/3	Cumulative total	Advanced GNVQ candidates (1993 entry excludes final year dropouts)	Cumulative total
0-19	2.8	2.8	9.9	9.9
20-29	1.6	4.4	25.0	34.9
30-39	12.6	17.0	44.7	79.6
40-49	35.7	52.7	17.4	97.0
50-59	34.3	87.0	2.8	99.8
60+	13.0	100	0.2	100.00

(A = 7 points, G = 1 point)

Closer examination of achievement patterns among GCSE candidates makes it clear that, unless there are major changes in GCE A-level recruitment, this difference between Advanced GNVQ and GCE A-level students is likely to endure. Any other result is incompatible with the government's recruitment targets for GNVQ.

At present around a third of GCSE candidates go on to take GCE A or AS levels two years later: and in fact in 1992/3 32% of 17-18 year olds passed at least one such examination.* In 1993, 41% of GCSE candidates passed 5 or more subjects at C grade or above, and 46% obtained four or more subjects at the same level. Even without any increase in GCE A-level recruitment, this suggests that there are likely to be relatively small numbers of students who are potential GCE A-level students in terms of GCSE grades, but do not in fact opt for GCE A levels. Moreover, not all of these will want to take GNVQs: some, for example, will enter apprenticeship programmes or other more occupationally specific courses.

More detailed data on the prior GCSE attainments of GCE A level students** confirm that GCE A-level courses currently absorb a very high proportion of students with high GCSE grades. In 1993, GCE A-level candidates encompassed 79% of those who, two years earlier, had achieved five or more grades at C or above including Maths and English: and 77% of those who had achieved four or more grades at this level including Maths and English. (In fact, a very high proportion of those obtaining at least four or five grades at this level include among their results C+ grades in Maths and English. This is particularly true of English. 36% of GCSE candidates in 1991 obtained five or more C+ GCSEs including both these subjects; 7% had five or more C+ grades including English but not Maths, and less than one per cent five or more C+ grades with Maths but not English.)***

The modal 'official' entry criterion for Advanced GNVQs of four or more GCSEs at C+, with no specified subjects, might appear to take account of the overwhelming tendency of high-achieving GCSE students to enter GCE A- level courses. However, what the figures above make clear is that such an entry criterion in fact implies an extremely narrow recruitment base for Advanced GNVQs. Most of the students who are at or above this 'threshold' have actually obtained considerably better results, and are within the group encompassed by current GCE A-level recruitment.

* Source: DFE Statistical bulletin 7/94 (England only)

** Source 16-18 Project, University of Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations (England only)

*** As the figures make clear, almost all students with C+ in Maths and English get at least 5 GCSEs at this level. 69% of all candidates with C+ in Maths go on to A level compared to 59% of all those with English at C+. Maths thus provides a key 'gateway' or sorting mechanism for A levels.

In this situation, there are three options for Advanced GNVQ recruitment. Either it recruits heavily among students who previously would have done GCE A levels, reversing the current trend towards increasing proportions of students entering GCE A-level courses. Of this there is so far no sign. Alternatively, it targets and recruits from a very small part of the age cohort. This was not the government's original objective for the award and is at odds with increased staying-on rates and financial incentives to centres to recruit more students. Or, finally, Advanced GNVQ recruits from students who are below the 'official' entry criterion set by centres for the course. Not surprisingly, it is the latter which appears to have occurred.

What are students taking with GNVQs?

One of the major differences between GNVQs and the BTEC awards which are their major pre-existing equivalent, is that GNVQs are expressly designed to allow combination with other studies: with GCE A levels being the 'addition' which has received the most attention from government ministers, the press, and the general public. The focus on GCE A-level combinations rather than vocational awards, and the emphasis on GNVQ/GCE equivalences, reflects a major finding of this report: namely that **GNVQs are at present developing, and being encouraged to develop, as essentially educational and academic awards** whose 'success' will be judged largely by numbers securing entry into higher education.

The student survey included questions on what else GNVQ students were studying. Tables 9 and 10 show the extent to which Advanced & Intermediate students in our sample are combining their GNVQ with 1 or more GCE A levels. **At present approximately 15% of Advanced GNVQ respondents are combining their GNVQ with one or more GCE A level (though our case study interviews indicate that the figure may have been higher at the start of the academic year). The remaining 85% are not.***

The majority of these GCE A levels are in related fields: only a little over six per cent of the sample are combining GNVQ Advanced with one or more unrelated GCE A level. An interesting finding was that some students in some centres are combining Intermediate GNVQs with GCE A levels, although absolute numbers are very small. The 1994-5 student survey, which will cover more students in more centres, should indicate whether this is a first year phenomenon reflecting uncertainty about what Intermediate GNVQs are 'about' or the beginning of something like the Scottish pattern of combining an academic Highers programme with a number of vocational National Certificate modules.

Table 9

Numbers of Advanced GNVQ students also taking GCE A levels

	%	N
1 related A Level	7.7	46
1 unrelated A Level	5.9	35
2 related A Levels	0.5	3
1 related/1unrelated A Level	0.5	3
2 unrelated A Levels	0.0	0
No A Levels taken	85.4	510
		Σ597

* UCAS research shows that 31% of Advanced GNVQ applicants to HE who applied in 1993-4 (and so started their GNVQs in 1992) offered one or more GCE A levels with their Advanced GNVQ

Table 10

Numbers of Intermediate GNVQ students also taking GCE A levels

	%	N
1 related A Level	1.2	6
1 unrelated A Level	1.4	7
2 related A Levels	0.8	4
1 related/1unrelated A Level	0.2	1
2 unrelated A Levels	0.0	0
No A Levels taken	96.4	488
		Σ 506

Table 11 summarises GCE A level take-up by vocational area. Art & Design students are the most likely to be taking a GCE A level as well: in almost every case, one in a related field (e.g. Art, Photography, Graphics). Proportions for the other three Advanced courses are roughly equal.*

Table 11

% of Advanced GNVQ students taking one or more GCE A levels, by vocational area

	% taking A Levels (1 or 2)	No. taking A Levels	Sample size
Art & Design	26.5	35	132
Business	12.2	35	288
Health & Social Care	11.4	8	70
Leisure & Tourism	10.7	9	84

Tables 12 and 13 compare GNVQ/GCE A-level combinations in FE colleges, schools and sixth form colleges. They indicate that GCE A levels are taken by GNVQ candidates much more often in the latter two than in the former, although the absolute numbers of GCE A-level candidates remain highest in FE. We would caution against placing too much weight on this finding given the small numbers of students and centres involved. 'Conventional wisdom' — reflected in the comments of our case study respondents — is that FE is more open in its recruitment: and the lower proportion of GCE A-level students in FE GNVQ groups would be consistent with there being more academically weak students in the FE cohort. However, our own student data (presented in detail in Appendix II) do not show such a clear-cut difference. The proportions of Advanced students with Five or more GCSEs at C or above are virtually identical for schools and colleges, though somewhat higher for the (small) sixth form college sample. The differences in GCE A-level take-up may therefore be associated with other factors, such as administration and funding. We will be looking at this in more depth in 1994-5.

* As noted above, we have no figures for Advanced Manufacturing which is extremely rare.

Table 12

GCE A-level/GNVQ combinations for all students by centre type

	FE College	VIth Form College	School
% doing no A Levels	93	83.3	88.0
% doing 1 A Level	6.7	14.5	9.9
% doing 2 A Levels	0.2 (n=2)	2.2 (n=3)	2.1 (n=6)
N =	682	138	283

Table 13

GCE A-level/GNVQ combinations for Advanced GNVQ students by centre type

	FE College	VIth Form College	School
% doing no A Levels	89.5	70.5	75.6
% doing 1 A Level	10.1	26.2	22.2
% doing 2 A Levels	0.4 (n=2)	3.3 (n=2)	2.2 (n=2)
N =	446	61	90

Combining GNVQs and GCE A levels: case studies

Most of the centres included in the site visit were less than enthusiastic about the viability of GNVQ/GCE A-level combinations, given the general nature of their GNVQ intake. Two centres had strong views on combining GCE A levels and GNVQs. The co-ordinator at one centre said, 'The GNVQ students are not A level students, that's why they're doing GNVQs', although she wondered whether students might attempt a GCE AS level in the second year of their programme. The co-ordinator explained further that, irrespective of the merits of students attempting a GCE A level with an Advanced GNVQ, the sheer volume of work required for an Advanced GNVQ meant that it was difficult for the student to find the time to take any additional studies, let alone a GCE A level. At another centre, despite GCE A levels being available alongside Advanced GNVQs, the GNVQ Business team leader wondered what the benefit of taking a GCE A level with an Advanced GNVQ might be. He said, 'They never needed it [a GCE A level] with the National Diploma in Business.'

The design of GNVQs provides for additional units, and it is expected that many students, especially at Advanced level, will combine these with their 'core' qualification. A very wide range of such units is now being offered by the awarding bodies. We found little evidence of take-up in our sample, but would emphasise that this may be a function of timing. Many additional units were only made available during 1993-4 and awarding bodies expect centres to offer them, for the most part, in the second year of an Advanced course. Site visit centres' reports on their planned use of additional units are consistent with this view.

Data were also collected on the numbers of students and centres undertaking **NVQ units as additional studies. These numbers were very low**. At Intermediate level, NVQ units were offered, and taken by some or all students, in five per cent of Business courses, eight per cent of Leisure & Tourism courses, one Health & Social Care course out of 65 (1.5%), two out of 18 Manufacturing courses (11%), and no Art & Design courses. Figures at Advanced level were very similar.

* NVQ units were being offered and taken by some or all students in one Health and Social Care centre out of 22, two Leisure and Tourism centres out of 23, five Business centres out of 57 (9%) and no Art and Design centres.

Additional studies for Intermediate students: case studies

The majority of site-visit centres did not offer any additional studies to most Intermediate GNVQ students. The exceptions were largely GCSEs: reflecting findings from the national sample. Three of the five schools visited offered GCSEs as additional studies to Intermediate GNVQ students. However two of these restricted GCSEs to Maths and English. The other only allowed students to resit Maths and English but students could take 'new' GCSEs alongside their GNVQ. One college did integrate resits into Intermediate GNVQ but confined this to Maths or English; while another argued that GCSE Maths resit was not a realistic option for Intermediate students and intended to offer 'London Board Numeracy' instead; and some offered City & Guilds Wordpower and Numberpower and/or RSA Computer Literacy and IT awards. One centre offered an NVQ level 1 as an addition to students on Intermediate GNVQ programmes in Leisure & Tourism and Health & Social Care. Another had tried offering a modern language unit, but found all the GNVQ Intermediate students dropping out.

At one centre a single student on an Intermediate GNVQ Art & Design programme was also taking GCE A-level Art. The school explained that 'He's a special case — a good artist with some learning difficulties who was originally doing a GCE A level programme (i.e. 3 GCE A levels) but found it too demanding and dropped everything except the GCE Art A level.'

By far the most common form of 'additional study' is a GCSE resit. We noted above that many students — both Advanced and Intermediate — have relatively low grades in the 'key' GCSE subjects of English and, most markedly, Maths. The student questionnaire provided information on the proportions of such students re-taking GCSEs in these subjects.*

Table 14

Percentage of GNVQ students also re-sitting Maths and English GCSE (student sample)

	Maths GCSE			English GCSE		
% of Advanced students re-sitting	16			12		
	FE	**VIth FC**	**School**	**FE**	**VIth FC**	**School**
% of Advanced students by centre type	14	25 (n = 15)	23	12	7 (n = 4)	13
% of Intermediate students re-sitting	26			27		
	FE	**VIth FC**	**School**	**FE**	**VIth FC**	**School**
% of Intermediate students by centre type	8	36 (n = 28)	44	19	40	30

Table 14 indicates that about a quarter of Intermediate students are also taking/retaking Maths and English GCSEs. The figures for Advanced students are much lower: well under a fifth. This is slightly surprising, especially for Mathematics, where so many Advanced students obtained grades lower than C. The table also indicates substantial differences between types of centre in the extent to which GCSE resits are combined with GNVQs. **Students in FE colleges are consistently much less likely to re-take GCSEs than are those in schools or sixth-form colleges: and this difference is especially marked for Intermediate students.** While numbers in the sixth-form college group are small, so that the usual caveats apply, it is nonetheless very striking that only eight per cent of the (large) group of Intermediate students in colleges are retaking Maths compared to 36% in sixth form colleges and 44% in schools. Possible explanations will be investigated further in the 1994–5 follow-up.

* Respondents to the main survey were also asked what proportion of their students were retaking Maths or English GCSE. The data are not always clearly expressed but the proportions are very similar to those found for the student sample.

Tables 15 and 16 provide further details on re-sit patterns among Intermediate (Table 15) and Advanced (Table 16) students. Re-takes are most common among those who obtained a D in the given subject at GCSE, probably reflecting the conviction of many staff that students with lower grades are unlikely to register large improvements on a re-take.

Table 15

Maths and English GCSE re-takes: patterns of take-up among Intermediate GNVQ students

	<3 GCSEs A-D	3 GCSEs at A-D	4 GCSEs at A-D	5+ GCSEs at A-D
% retaking Maths	18.2	28.9	29.1	30.4
% retaking English	27.3	27.6	30.2	23.6

	% with a given grade in GCSE Maths who are resitting	% with a given grade in GCSE English who are resitting
U	3.8	0.0
F	27.1	6.7
E	28.3	30.7
D	39.7	45.2
C	9.4	7.4

Table 16

Maths and English GCSE re-takes: patterns of take-up among Advanced GNVQ students

	<3 GCSEs A-D	3 GCSEs at A-D	4 GCSEs at A-D	5+ GCSEs at A-D
% retaking Maths	16.2	23.8	26.7	8.7
% retaking English	16.8	12.9	16.7	4.8

	% with a given grade in GCSE Maths who are resitting	% with a given grade in GCSE English who are resitting
U	12.5	-
F	20.9	-
E	25.2	22.9
D	32.7	39.7
C	1.5	1.3

What both tables underline, however, is that the large majority of students are not retaking GCSEs, even when they received a D the first time. This is true for both Maths and English, though the 'shortfall' is greater in the case of Maths. Failure to retake may cause problems for these students later, given their aspirations for higher education. When we compared the future plans of students with C grades or above in Maths and English with those of students with lower grades in these subjects, we found no significant differences. Virtually identical proportions express the intention of proceeding to higher education or specialised full time training. However, many higher education institutions look for C grades in both these key areas. The potential problem is compounded by the fact that the vast majority of centres do not offer core skills at anything but the 'compulsory' level for the given award: i.e. level 2 core skills for Intermediate, level 3 for Advanced.' Moreover, as discussed later, there is considerable evidence that core skills delivery is in a state of considerable confusion at present.

* Although an Intermediate GNVQ has an official equivalent to four to five GCSEs at grades A-C, the subjects are not specified. Thus, there is no commitment to making them equivalent to four to five GCSEs including Maths and English.

WHERE DO GNVQ STUDENTS PLAN TO GO NEXT?

The introduction of GNVQs has coincided with a rapid and continuing increase in staying-on rates, and in this part of this report we will be considering some of the implications of this shift. Tables 17 and 18 provide some of the data on which these concluding remarks will be based, by summarising current aspirations and expectations on the part of our student sample.

Table 17 demonstrates that **the large majority of Intermediate students expect to continue with educational/academic studies**: only a very few expect to be taking an NVQ. Moreover, almost half plan to be taking an Advanced GNVQ. In view of teachers' and senior staff's comments on progression from Intermediate to Advanced GNVQs, these plans may be either optimistic or problematic. However they suggest that Intermediate GNVQs have already established themselves in students' eyes as a clear progression route: and that 'deferred' entry into Advanced GNVQs is likely to become even more frequent than at present.

The Advanced students in our sample were all first years and so the overwhelming majority expect to be completing their courses next year. Table 18, however, summarises both Intermediate and Advanced students' aspirations and expectations for three years hence. What is immediately apparent is the extent to which **Advanced and even Intermediate students look towards higher education**. If we include 'specialised training' — which for most respondents meant nursing, itself now HE-based — we find that well over half the Advanced respondents expect to be in higher education: and that this is also true of 40% of the Intermediate group. We found no differences at all in the plans and aspirations of students with and students without grade C or above in GCSE English and/or Maths, either in the Intermediate or the Advanced group.

NVQs, in contrast, are hardly mentioned. Moreover, while at Intermediate level; there are clear differences between subjects — far fewer Leisure & Tourism students are planning further study — at Advanced level there are no such inter-subject differences. **All these first-phase Advanced GNVQs seem to be perceived by students as essentially educational qualifications, whose most important single purpose is to provide a progression route into higher education.**

Table 17

Intermediate students: Expected destination in 1994-5 as described in summer 1994 (number of responses in brackets)

	Total	Business	H&SC	L&T	A&D	Manuf.
Advanced GNVQ	46% (223)	53% (75)	46% (52)	49% (50)	40% (45)	8% (1)
NVQ	4% (17)	4% (6)	4% (4)	2% (2)	3% (3)	17% (2)
Other FE	20% (98)	11% (15)	26% (29)	12% (12)	37% (42)	- -
Work	19% (93)	23% (32)	14% (16)	29% (29)	10% (11)	42% (5)
A Levels	3% (14)	2% (3)	2% (2)	3% (3)	4% (4)	17% (2)

Note: columns sum to less than 100%. The remaining respondents (eight per cent in total) either listed a choice different from any of the categories or did not reply.

Table 18a

Plans for three years' time: Advanced GNVQ students

	Total		Business		Health & Social Care		Leisure & Tourism		Art & Design	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
HE	302	53	35	48	28	40	39	47	100	76
Specialist training programme	36	6	11	4	23	33	1	1	1	1
Total: further education and training	338	59	46	52	51	73	40	48	101	77

Table 18b

Plans for three years' time: Intermediate GNVQ students

	Total		Business		Health & Social Care		Leisure & Tourism		Art & Design		Manufac-turing	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
HE	138	29	41	29	37	33	13	13	46	41	1	8
Specialist training programme	53	11	10	7	26	23	8	8	8	7	1	8
Total: further education and training	211	40	51	36	63	56	21	21	54	48	2	16

Note for tables 18a and b: most of the remaining respondents indicated that they planned to be in full-time employment in three years' time. A few (around two per cent) listed other options.

Evidence from the site visits

Further information on emerging patterns of student progression from GNVQs was obtained from the case study visits carried out during late spring and early summer 1994.

Progression from GNVQs

Interviews with staff at the site visit centres suggest that teaching staff are generally aware of students' progression plans. There is considerable optimism about Advanced GNVQs as a route into HE; but also concern about whether Intermediate students' aspirations are realistic.

Most centres offering Advanced GNVQs expected a majority of graduates to progress to higher education. For example one college estimated that 100% of Art & Design and 80% of Business graduates would progress to HE. Other colleges suggested that the overall proportion progressing to HE would be about 60%; or 'overwhelming'; or 'a fair proportion'. In each case, projections seemed to be an extrapolation from experience with BTEC National students.

The picture concerning Intermediate GNVQs was less clear. The majority of centres suggested that at least some Intermediate GNVQ graduates would continue in further education and named VQs/GNVQs but also BTEC qualifications, NNEB and NVQs as the likely progression routes. However, as noted earlier, four of these centres expressed some caution about the suitability of Intermediate GNVQs as a route to Advanced GNVQs, and about the aspirations of many Intermediate students to progress this far, let alone to higher education. At present there is considerable confusion regarding the level/standard intended for Intermediate GNVQs. As noted above, most site visit centres expressed the intention of demanding higher entry qualifications for Intermediate courses in the future. However, financial incentives to increase enrolments may well act as a countervailing pressure. In that case, the problems described here are likely to continue. The high aspirations of Intermediate students — and their strong preference for academic rather than more vocational (NVQ) progression routes — underline the importance of clarifying the nature of the award and its substantive equivalence with other qualifications.

COURSE DELIVERY

The questionnaire to GNVQ co-ordinators and subject team leaders contained a considerable number of questions relating to course delivery and organisation. These are relatively difficult to code and analyse because of the enormous variety in the way GNVQs are being delivered at present. The tables below demonstrate some of this variability.

Delivery and timetabling

Information on mode of delivery and timetabling was collected from individual subject team leaders at both Intermediate and Advanced level. There was tremendous variation in the responses, particularly for Advanced-level GNVQs. It appears that many centres were still somewhat unsure of how they ought to be delivering the GNVQ units, and will be making changes next year, in the light of their 1993-4 experiences.

Variability in delivery patterns can be illustrated using Intermediate responses. In the overwhelming majority of cases Intermediate GNVQs are being offered as a one-year full-time course. There are thus six vocational units to be delivered over the year.Team leaders were asked whether units were delivered sequentially (one by one), offered two units per term, three units per semester, or in another delivery mode. The most popular response was two units per term (the choice of around 40-45% of respondents in Business, Health & Social Care and Leisure & Tourism). Manufacturing was roughly equally divided between the sequential and two units per term options — though only 18 responses were obtained from centres offering Intermediate Manufacturing. 46% of Art and Design team leaders said they used a different mode from any of the options specified.

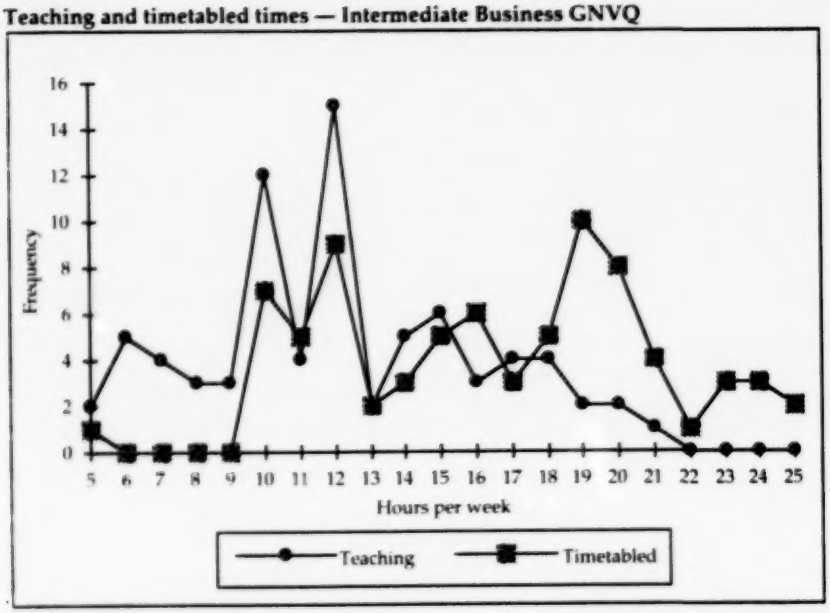
The number of hours of teaching time devoted to the GNVQ varied from five to 25 hours per week for both Intermediate and Advanced levels. It was interesting to note that in all cases, for both Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs (with the exception of Advanced Art and Design), the modal number of hours allocated was 12.* However answers were not clustered around this value. On the contrary, distributions were generally very flat, typically with standard deviations of about a third of the mean, and frequencies for modal values of around 15-20%. Where greater consistency did emerge was among those respondents who report a delivery pattern of two units per term. In this group, teaching times do tend to cluster around approximately 12 hours per week, with typically around 50% of responses falling in the 10-15 hours per week range.

Many of the respondents who reported low (≤7) hours per week teaching time stated that most or all of their students were taking other courses in addition to the GNVQ. (As might be expected, the most popular were GCSE Maths and English retakes. There were also a few cases of students in this 'low teaching time' group taking one or two GCE A levels, and only spending about five hours per week on the GNVQ as a sort of supplement to their GCE A-level programme). However this was not always the case, and some centres which reported high hours per week teaching times on GNVQs also stated that many of their students were taking other courses.

Responses for numbers of hours per week *timetabled* for GNVQ students were generally, as one would expect, higher than the number of hours of teaching time. Again there is a considerable spread, partially due perhaps to the fact that whereas some centres will expect their students to undertake a certain amount of private study each week in their own time without specifying when this should be, in others this appears explicitly on the timetable. Figure 16 illustrates responses regarding teaching and timetabled times using Intermediate GNVQs in Business as an example.

Figure 16

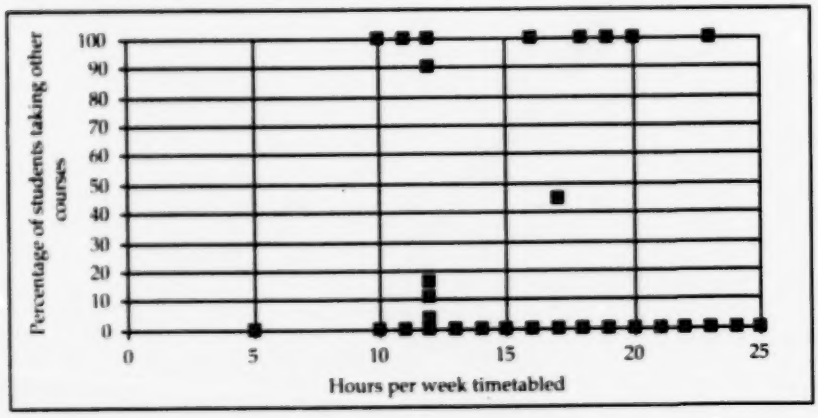
Teaching and timetabled times — Intermediate Business GNVQ



A typical picture of the relationship between proportions of students taking other courses and hours per week timetabled for the GNVQ is given in Figure 17 below, which again summarises the situation for Intermediate Business.Each plot in Figure 17 represents a single centre's response:for example this figure shows one centre, where no students took other courses with their GNVQ, which timetabled ten hours per week to the GNVQ and another centre which also timetabled ten hours a week to the GNVQ but where all (100%) of students took another course as well as their GNVQ. Plots for GNVQs in the other subject areas are similar.

Figure 17

Timetabling — Intermediate Business GNVQ



At Advanced level, responses were again highly varied with no clearly preferred option for mode of delivery — though offering units sequentially was not very popular; typically the choice of less than 15% of respondents. Preferences were fairly evenly spread among the other three options. Again there was no obvious relationship between time allocated to the GNVQ and proportions of students taking other courses as well, though more additionality was reported than for Intermediate responses. (Maths and English resits are, as mentioned above, the most popular additional studies taken at Advanced as well as Intermediate level; GNVQ additional units are also mentioned by some centres.) Figures 18 and 19 illustrate the same data for Advanced Business as shown in Figs 16 and 17 for Intermediate Business. Pictures for the other Advanced subject areas are similar.

Figure 18

Teaching and timetabled time — Advanced Business GNVQ

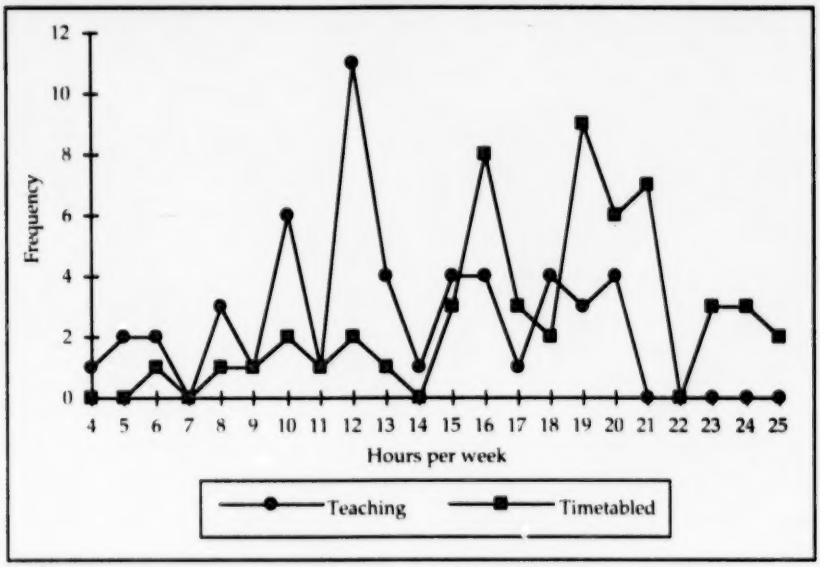
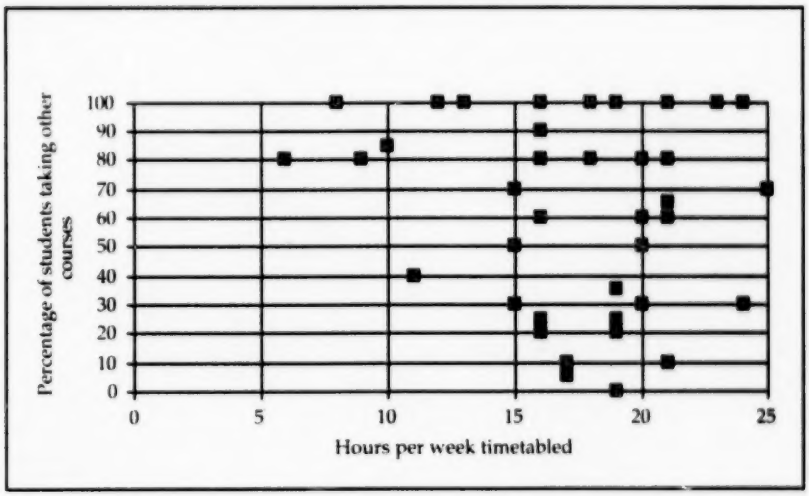


Figure 19

Timetabling — Advanced Business GNVQ



Core skills

About a third of subject team leaders for all GNVQs surveyed, except Health & Social Care, reported that they did not allocate any separate lessons specifically to core skills teaching. About 80% of respondents said that they allocated three or fewer lessons per week to core skills. In Intermediate Health & Social Care, however, only eight per cent of respondents indicated that they had no separate core skills lessons, and 45% said they allocated more than three lessons a week to core skills. In Advanced Health and Social Care, 18% reported no separate core skills lessons, and 32% reported more than three per week.

Around two-thirds of respondents, in all subject areas except Intermediate Health and Social Care, said that GCSE Maths and English retakes were offered in core skills lessons. In Intermediate Health & Social Care only 19% reported offering English and 22% reported offering Maths GCSE. About 55% of respondents said that they offered IT teaching in separate core skills lessons — the lowest response was in Advanced Business, where only 39% of centres reported doing so. Communication and Application of Number received less specialised attention; approximately 40% of centres said that separate core skills lessons were devoted specifically to these units.

Teaching staff in most centres were having some problems in fully integrating the application of number unit, in particular, into the GNVQ structure (see Table 19). Staff at a number of the site visit centres stated that in order to cover the range requirements in this unit they had simply had to give students at least one or two thinly disguised Maths tests. As might be expected the responses to the first item in Table 19 varied considerably by vocational subject area; for example, the percentage of 'not true' responses in Advanced Business was 21%, whereas in Intermediate Art and Design it was 0%.

About 10% of centres said that only core skills staff were directly involved in planning and delivering core skills; the rest reported involvement of other GNVQ staff as well.

Centres are obliged to offer and assess the core skills of communication, application of number and IT at the level of the GNVQ involved — level 2 for Intermediate, level 3 for Advanced. Level 2 is conventionally equated with levels 5 and 6 in the National Curriculum, and level 3 with level 7. Centres may, if they wish, offer these core skills at higher levels as well. However, these options are very rarely taken up. Only 10% of Intermediate and 11% of Advanced GNVQ course leaders reported offering levels higher than the mandatory ones in the three compulsory core skills, with no significant differences between areas.

Centres may also, if they wish, offer the optional core skills of 'problem solving' and 'personal skills'. These are much more popular at Advanced than Intermediate level. At Intermediate level 27% of courses offer personal skills and 22% problem solving; and at Advanced level the proportions rise to 43% and 40%. There are also some sizeable and rather puzzling differences between vocational areas. At Intermediate level, the optional core skill units are most popular in Art and Design: at Advanced, this is where they are least likely to be offered.

The national sample and the case studies both indicated considerable confusion regarding methods of core skills delivery. Table 19 displays the responses to a number of statements relevant to core skills teaching with which respondents were presented. It shows considerable variation in practice, and this was found within as well as across institutions. The case study visits confirmed this picture. Institutions had experimented and were continuing to experiment with a variety of approaches, and were consistent largely in their dissatisfaction with whatever approach they had tried recently. Thus, centres using integrated approaches largely intended to move to separate delivery, and those who had used separate delivery proposed to try integration in the future.

Table 19

Delivery of core skills: Intermediate

Statement	N	True	Sometimes true	Not true for us
We sometimes have to construct special assignments to cover range requirements on *Application of number*	224	57% (128)	33% (73)	10% (23)
We sometimes have to construct special assignments to cover range requirements on *IT*	229	38% (89)	34% (77)	28% (63)
We sometimes have to construct special assignments to cover range requirements on *Communication*	229	17% (39)	28% (65)	55% (125)
Core skill results are used in grading	224	26% (59)	35% (78)	39% (87)
Students with GCSEs at a given level are credited with CS attainments automatically	223	4% (8)	14% (32)	82% (183)

Advanced

Statement	N	True	Sometimes true	Not true for us
We sometimes have to construct special assignments to cover range requirements on *Application of number*	105	55% (58)	27% (28)	18% (19)
We sometimes have to construct special assignments to cover range requirements on *IT*	103	41% (42)	29% (30)	30% (31)
We sometimes have to construct special assignments to cover range requirements on *Communication*	104	17% (18)	20% (21)	63% (65)
Core skill results are used in grading	106	25% (26)	32% (34)	43% (46)
Students with GCSEs at a given level are credited with CS attainments automatically	104	3% (3)	7% (7)	90% (94)

Core skills delivery: case studies

From the site visits it became apparent that approaches to core skill delivery and assessment varied considerably. Indeed in a single college different approaches were used according to the GNVQ title. Thus, core skills were delivered, and often assessed, apart from the vocational units for Art & Design, integrated across all the vocational units for Health & Social Care and integrated into some (and not all) vocational units for Business. There was also consensus that changes to the delivery and assessment of core skills would be necessary for the new teaching year, no matter the approach in use. Two centres were adamant that delivering and assessing core skills apart from the vocational units had led to a tension between the different parts of the programme and the de-contextualisation of the core skills. These centres were planning to integrate core skills into the vocational units in the future. Meanwhile four centres were equally convinced that the integrated approach to core skills had not been successful: one GNVQ tutor commented: 'I'm not experienced in teaching numeracy — how am I supposed to be able to address the core skills adequately as well as cover the vocational content?' while staff at another centre concluded that integration had failed to provide adequate opportunities for students to demonstrate core skill achievement. These centres were planning to switch to using specialist core skill staff to deliver and assess core skills in specialist core skill workshop sessions.

WHAT DOES GNVQ REPLACE? IS IT PROVIDING AN ACADEMIC-VOCATIONAL BRIDGE?

How students choose GNVQs

GNVQs are still very new and unfamiliar, and we were interested to discover how students had heard of and selected GNVQ courses. We therefore asked all those in the student sample whether their current course had been their first choice, and, if not, what they would have preferred.

The answers turn out to be somewhat difficult to interpret because many students seem to have interpreted the questions slightly differently from the way we intended: as meaning 'Was this the course you actually applied for?' The reason for the ambiguity is that many colleges and sixth-form colleges operate an enrolment and admissions policy whereby students who are interested in attending are invited for interview. At that interview the college tutor/counsellor suggests courses and qualifications which accord with the students' own interests and capabilities. It is thus quite possible for a course to be someone's 'first choice' even if they had never heard of it before attending a college open day or interview.

With this caveat in mind, Table 20 indicates that the large majority of students had made a positive choice to take GNVQs, and were not pursuing them simply as a second best because the course they wanted was full, or because they were denied entry. A smaller proportion noted a preference for courses which we have categorised as 'specialised vocational'. This covered a range of possibilities (e.g. NNEB, NVQs, City and Guilds.) Of those for whom GNVQs were not the first choice, about 40% would have preferred to do GCE A levels, and about 31% had wanted to take a BTEC Diploma. 47% of those whose first choice had been a GCE A level programme reported that the reason they were not taking GCE A levels was that their grades were too low. 45% of those whose first choice had been a BTEC Diploma said that they were doing the GNVQ instead because 'BTEC was changed to GNVQ'. The most common reason for students being denied their first choice in all other cases was inadequate GCSE grades.

Almost half the current cohort of students are attending their school or college because they were offered a place on the relevant GNVQ, suggesting quite strong positive choices for one particular subject area over another (see Table 21). However, as table 21 also shows, reasons which have nothing to do with the actual content or objectives of GNVQs are also important. Ease of access, being with friends, and general institutional reputation are also highly relevant in deciding which institution to attend.

Table 22 provides further information on recruitment patterns during the first year of GNVQ provision for the sampled centres. A quarter of the students sampled had heard of GNVQs from 'independent' sources — that is, sources other than the educational and counselling professionals. The rest were steered towards GNVQs by teachers or other centre staff, or by the careers service. This proportion is likely to shift as GNVQs become established: but is consistent with the case study centres' reports that very active recruiting was necessary to fill places in the first year. There is also one major difference between Intermediate and Advanced students' response to this question: teachers were much more important to the former group, while Advanced students were much more likely to ask what the centre had on offer.

Table 20

(a) Whether GNVQ was students' first choice (student sample)

	%
Whole sample	
Yes	73
No	27
Intermediate	
Yes	72
No	28
Advanced	
Yes	74
No	26

(b) Preferred option of those for whom GNVQ was not first choice (student sample)

		As % of 'non-first choice' students	As % of sample
All students	A Levels	39	11
	BTEC	31	8
	Specialised vocational course	15	4
Intermediate	A Levels	26	8
	BTEC	32	9
	Specialised vocational course	19	5
	Advanced GNVQ	6	2
Advanced	A Levels	53	13
	BTEC	30	8
	Specialised vocational course	11	3

Table 21

Why students attend their current institution (student sample)

	%
Easy to get to	54
Offered this GNVQ	43
Offered a place	36
Already there	30
Friends attend	26
Good academic reputation	23
Good facilities	23
Good combination of subjects offered	15

More than 1 answer possible: responses sum to more than 100%

Table 22

	%
Teacher suggested it	45
Parents suggested it	5
Careers office suggested it	6
Heard about GNVQs independently	11
Asked what was on offer	32
Friends were doing it	9

More than 1 answer possible: responses sum to more than 100%

How far are GNVQs displacing vocational provision?

Prior to the introduction of GNVQs, vocational provision at levels comparable to Intermediate & Advanced GNVQs could be divided into two: highly specific qualifications providing for direct entry into the labour market, some but not all of which had been converted to NVQs, and more general vocational or pre-vocational awards (such as CPVE, DVE and many of the BTEC diplomas) which were not part of the NVQ framework.

Our evidence to date indicates that it is entirely in the second group that GNVQs have displaced previously existing awards. For example, in the fifteen case study sites visited to date, 13 have simply treated GNVQs as re-specifications of DVE or BTEC provision. In general, the replacement of BTEC Firsts, DVE and CPVE by Intermediate GNVQs has been welcomed, even though this is not a direct substitution — as many centres originally thought — and there have therefore been major problems (discussed above) in deciding appropriate levels, entry and progression routes.

There has also been considerable replacement of National Diplomas through, in effect, a straightforward substitution with respect to candidates, standards and progression possibilities (and with correspondingly fewer implementation problems.) However, there is also some indication that, over the post-compulsory programme as a whole, the substitution of GNVQs for other awards may prove problematic. Two issues were raised: the suitability of GNVQs for part-time students, and the degree to which they could replace more specialised vocational awards.

Evidence from the site visits

Further information on the ability of GNVQs to replace existing awards was obtained from the case study visits carried out during late spring and early summer of 1994.

GNVQs and vocational qualifications

Many of the centres visited argued that the list of GNVQs currently planned would not provide adequate substitutes for many of the more specialised full-time vocational qualifications currently available. Whereas BTEC Firsts and DVE were essentially educational/pre-vocational in style and content, at higher levels there are many well-established, specialised full-time courses with clear routes into employment. (A comparable situation in France has lead to the development/retention of both a more specialised technician qualification and the vocational baccalauréat). Examples of centres' concerns were collected.

Concerns over GNVQs' ability to substitute for existing awards: case studies

Centres A and B

Staff, when questioned about the adequacy of GNVQs and NVQs to replace all the vocational qualifications, said that although the GNVQs could replace the broader vocational qualifications, and NVQs some of the very specific occupational qualifications, neither GNVQs nor NVQs could replace adequately all the specialist vocational qualifications offered by the college. A programme team at Centre A was very happy with the Advanced GNVQ in Art & Design as a replacement for a qualification in General Art & Design but could not envisage advanced qualifications in Photography, Graphic Design and Design, for example, being adequately replaced by GNVQs or NVQs. As staff at centre B put it: *'We have qualifications which are not as narrow and job specific as NVQs and far more vocational and employment related than GNVQs; we need a fourth track between NVQs and GNVQs.'* This centre, like others, was continuing to offer more specialised VQs, alongside GNVQs, in the vocational areas covered by GNVQs.

Centre C, D, E, F

Concerns were expressed at four centres with experience of offering vocational qualifications in the health, social and child care sectors. Staff pointed out that all the older VQs had been more specialised or focused than the new GNVQs. While staff agreed that the Advanced GNVQ in Health & Social Care was suitable for students who had not committed themselves to a particular vocation, staff were concerned that the GNVQ was far less adequate for those students who wanted to specialise in Child Care, Social Care or Health Care for example. One centre was adamant that the replacement of its BTEC National in Social Care with the Advanced GNVQ in Health & Social Care had weakened progression routes from the centre into the Social Care profession. Other centres expressed similar worries about the inadequacy of the GNVQ as a potential replacement for Child Care or Nursery Nursing programmes.

Centre G

The replacement of two separate qualifications in Leisure Studies and Travel & Tourism with a single qualification covering Leisure and Tourism had created some recruitment, delivery and timetabling problems. As a consequence the centre had customised the GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism into a Sports/Leisure variant and a Travel/Tourism variant. Each local variant recruited separately, was delivered by specialist staff and prepared students for different progression routes. Staff recognised that this approach raised problems concerning range coverage, internal verification and the consistency of standards across the two local variants.

Many centre staff also argued that GNVQs were not really suitable for part-time study. It was felt that they were not adequate replacements for BTEC National Certificate programmes: partly because of the need for specialised vocational content, but also because of the demands of a part-time programme. A number of centres have signalled their intention to retain their entire BTEC National Certificate programmes intact. However, we plan to target a number of centres during the next phase of the study which have plans to deliver part-time GNVQs and investigate whether the problem is indeed related to part-time study, or whether the perceived need for National Certificates is more related to the content of the courses.

Almost all the discussion of/evidence relating to displacement of vocational awards by GNVQs relates to awards other than NVQs. Indeed, only two of the site visit centres even mentioned NVQs when commenting on displacements caused by the introduction of GNVQs. The large postal questionnaire produced a similar pattern. **In the whole sample of 156 centres, we were informed of only one case where an NVQ was being replaced by a GNVQ.**

Staff generally emphasised that the **populations 'served' by GNVQs and NVQs were quite different**. The awards were not even considered together, as possible alternatives, when decisions were being made about which courses to offer. In general the absence of any replacement of NVQs by GNVQs is not surprising since (a) few NVQs are available in colleges and schools (this is especially true in four of the five subject areas covered by the first five GNVQs) and (b) NVQs are clearly a very different sort of qualification (not full time, highly occupational, requiring simulations or workplaces for assessment).

The exception is Business where colleges have had and still offer full time NVQ Business Administration programmes to 16 year old students. While we have found no evidence of replacement in the survey to date, this may be an interim situation, especially given the strength of 16 and 17 year olds' interest in awards which offer the possibility of progression to further and higher education.

How far are GNVQs displacing GCE A level and GCSE provision?

There was **little evidence from the centres in the sample of any GCE A level being replaced (or displaced) by the introduction of GNVQs**. Indeed in some centres it was very clear that GNVQs were being offered only to those students for whom GCE A level achievement was unlikely, although elsewhere students were able, and encouraged, to combine GNVQs with a GCE A level. While this may well change as new GNVQs are introduced, and as the award becomes better known, at present there is limited overlap between the GCE A level and GNVQ Advanced student populations in terms of prior qualification levels, and this further reduces the potential for displacement/substitution.

Since we do not have any comparative information on the period prior to GNVQs' introduction it is difficult to assess the national impact of GNVQs on GCSE take-up. The data from the student questionnaire show that a significant number of GNVQ students re-take GCSE Maths and/or English — though rather fewer than their previous grades might lead one to expect. Evidence from the site visits is inconclusive, although it does suggest some possible trends to be followed up in the future.

Overall, there is little to suggest that GNVQs in their first year are having any real impact on GCSEs and GCE A levels except at the margins. However, this may, of course, change as the award matures.

CONCLUSION

As we explained in the introduction to this report, our research project on the evolution of GNVQs is primarily concerned to establish the position which GNVQs are developing within the overall framework of education and training, and the degree to which they are fulfilling the dual purpose mapped out for them in the original White Paper — to provide an educational progression route and a bridge to NVQs and specific vocational training. The results reported here are, obviously, provisional: there may be major changes in recruitment patterns next year which will change the current direction of GNVQ development. However, we think this is relatively unlikely and would venture the following provisional conclusions on the findings so far.

1. GNVQs are developing as an educational qualification, not a vocational one. There is little evidence so far that they are succeeding in providing a genuine pathway to, or bridge with, NVQs and other specific vocational awards. Current candidates for GNVQs are overwhelmingly in their teens, full-time, and progress onto GNVQs direct from GCSE or from other full-time educational courses. Students do not combine GNVQs with NVQs; the awards are not replacing NVQs; and the preferred progression routes identified by GNVQ students are educational not vocational.

2. GNVQs have been launched at a time when there is, in our view, a major and probably irreversible change in the educational aspirations and practices of British teenagers. Although policy makers and the public at large are still accustomed to thinking of this country as one where large numbers leave school at 16, the huge increase in staying-on rates and the aspirations and intentions of our student sample, suggest otherwise. The current generation of 16-21 year olds are determined to obtain further qualifications and to proceed to higher education in unprecedented numbers. Experience from other countries, notably France, where comparable changes have taken place in the recent past suggests that such changes are irreversible. They are also self-fuelling: near-universal achievement of qualifications at one level creates a demand for qualifications at the next level up.

   Our results suggest that centres which introduce GNVQs are responding to these forces, and to the perception that GNVQs will inevitably become the main non-GCE A level qualifications for 16-19 year olds, not to any intrinsic qualities of the awards. In the short term, this guarantees that GNVQs will continue to be the fastest growing sector of the educational 'market'.

3. Although GNVQs are almost certain to continue their current rapid expansion, there are important respects in which their position in the education and training system is unclear. This is especially true for Intermediate GNVQs, where the appropriate target population and standard of the award are not at all clearly understood.

   In the vast majority of cases, Advanced GNVQs are used as direct substitutes for BTEC Nationals, and are attracting a comparable segment of the 16-19 population. Intermediate GNVQs were originally perceived by centres as direct substitutes for the DVE and BTEC Firsts, but there is a growing consensus that they are in fact more demanding. It is therefore unclear whether Intermediate awards are targeted towards that whole section of the post-16 population which is not suited to Advanced courses: and, if not, whether Foundation GNVQ courses can substitute satisfactorily among the lowest achievers.

4. The prior qualifications of GNVQ students call into question the equivalences announced for GNVQs. Although most centres consider that the minimum entry level for an Advanced GNVQ is four Cs, in practice very many students have lower prior qualification levels. The average level on entry is between three and four Cs, i.e. below what is generally seen as the minimum desirable.

Equivalences are even more problematic at Intermediate level. Although an Intermediate GNVQ — obtained normally in one year — is meant to be equivalent to four or five GCSEs at grade C or above, the average Intermediate student on entry has between one and two GCSEs at this level, implying an enormous degree of progress in one year. In addition, staff frequently express doubts regarding the ability of many Intermediate students to progress onto Advanced GNVQ courses (suggesting that they question its equivalence even to three GCSEs at C or above).

5. Only a minority of GNVQ students are taking or retaking GCSEs in Maths and English, even though many of them have poor grades in these subjects at GCSE. (This is especially true for Maths.) However, the absence of formal programmes in Maths and English may create problems in the future, especially given the numbers aspiring to higher education and further training. Unless higher education institutions accept core skills units as equivalent to GCSE at grade C, applicants may find themselves lacking essential qualifications.

6. Although GNVQs were conceived as part, rather than the whole, of a full-time course, this is the exception rather than the rule at both Intermediate and Advanced levels. A minority (15%) of Advanced candidates combine the qualification with one (sometimes two) GCE A levels, and a slightly higher proportion of the GNVQ cohort as a whole is resitting GCSEs. However, for the majority it is a full-time course. Staff generally see the volume of work involved in a GNVQ as being as much as their students can cope with (or more). The situation is thus comparable to rather than different from that for GCE A levels: since for the latter, three subjects is the norm, but with a minority taking four, and another group only two. If funding is tied to the qualification, and the Advanced GNVQ is defined as two-thirds of a full-time course, this may cause problems in the future.

7. Different GNVQs are at present very consistent in the academic profile of student entrants, and in their general aspirations. In countries with comparable qualifications (e.g. the French vocational and technical baccalaureats) there is generally a clear hierarchy of prestige, related to the perceived difficulty of the awards. No such hierarchy is apparent at present for GNVQs.

8. There are some indications of significant differences between types of institution — not only in programmes offered (where schools are markedly different from FE), but also in student intake, and in the degree to which GNVQs are combined with other subjects. In general, it is sixth form colleges which seem to be developing in a distinctive way — i.e. they differ from schools and FE alike. If sectoral differences continue or strengthen, this may have major implications for the comparability of GNVQ awards.

9. The very large numbers of GNVQ students aspiring to higher education, and the absence of a clear progression route out of Intermediate for many students, are both potential sources of considerable strain. The latter in particular requires, in our view, immediate attention. We are doubtful as to whether the introduction of Foundation GNVQs will solve the 'problem': first, because many 16 year olds will not consider these to be a desirable post-GCSE option, and second because Foundation awards will not in themselves clarify the level and objectives of Intermediate awards.

10. Current policy envisages very large proportions of the 16-18 age cohort studying for GNVQs. Unless there is a very marked reduction in the proportion studying for GCE A level and/or a large increase in numbers obtaining high GCSE grades, this policy implies a continued 'mis-match' between centres' actual and desired entry criteria for GNVQ Advanced courses. Students who have the desired GCSE grades but who are not taking GCE A levels are a relatively small group. It would therefore seem desirable to acknowledge and plan for the actual likely profile of entrants and to do so at both national and institutional level.

Note also needs to be taken of the popularity of an educational route involving entry on to Advanced GNVQ courses a year or more after GCSE, via other courses. This already accounts for half of Advanced entries and is likely to increase in importance given Intermediate students' aspirations. The pattern implies that a three year 'sixth form' will become an important component of post-compulsory education. Failure to take account of these trends strengthens the impression that GNVQ design has not to date been very well conceptualised with respect to achievement levels and expected pathways in the post-16 cohort *as a whole*.

11. There are serious doubts among teaching staff as to whether existing and planned GNVQs can provide satisfactory substitutes for the many quite specialised vocational qualifications which currently are offered in further education (often on a full-time basis) and which have not been, and will not be, converted into NVQs. If this is correct, the country is likely to develop not a tripartite system (NVQs, GNVQs, GCE A levels) but instead one with four options — these three and a fourth education-based vocational/technician grouping. We would recommend that this issue be addressed now rather than such a structure emerging simply by default.

APPENDIX I

The phasing in of GNVQs

Intermediate and Advanced

	1992/3	1993/4	1994/5	1995/6	1996/7
Health & Social Care	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Leisure & Tourism	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Business	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Art & Design	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Manufacturing	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Science		Pilot	Available	Available	Available
Construction & the Built Environment		Pilot	Available	Available	Available
Hospitality & Catering		Pilot	Available	Available	Available
Engineering			Pilot	Available	Available
Information Technology			Pilot	Available	Available
Media: Communications & Production			Pilot	Available	Available
Distribution			Pilot	Pilot	Available
Management Studies (advanced only)			Pilot	Pilot	Available
Landbased & Environmental Industries					Pilot
Performing Arts					Pilot

Foundation

	1992/3	1993/4	1994/5	1995/6	1996/7
Health & Social Care		Pilot	Restricted*	Available	Available
Leisure & Tourism		Pilot	Restricted*	Available	Available
Business		Pilot	Restricted*	Available	Available
Art & Design		Pilot	Restricted*	Available	Available
Manufacturing		Pilot	Restricted*	Available	Available
Science			Pilot	Available	Available
Construction & the Built Environment			Pilot	Available	Available
Hospitality & Catering			Pilot	Available	Available
Engineering			Pilot	Available	Available
Information Technology			Pilot	Available	Available
Distribution				Pilot	Available
Media: communications & prod				Pilot	Available
Landbased & Environmental Industries					Pilot
Performing Arts					Pilot

* Restricted take-up (mainly limited to those centres offering intermediate GNVQs in the same vocational areas)

APPENDIX II

A. Supplementary Information on Student Qualifications

Table II.1

Percentage of Intermediate GNVQ students gaining GCSEs at C or above, by type of centre

Number of awards	FE College	VIth Form College	School
0	36	30	30
1	27	30	28
2	19	12	19
3	10	13	13
4	4	6	4
5	2	6	3
6	1	3	3
7+	1		

Table II.2

Percentage of Advanced GNVQ students gaining GCSEs at C or above by type of centre

Number of awards	FE College	VIth Form College	School
0	10	12	5
1	11	10	8
2	14	6	16
3	17	15	18
4	14	15	18
5	14	12	21
6	9	13	12
7+	11	17	2

Table II.3

Number of GCSEs A-C: Intermediate students (by vocational area)

	Art & Design (N = 117) %	Business (N = 143) %	Health & Social Care (N = 113) %	Leisure & Tourism (N = 104) %
0	27	40	28	33
1	27	24	27	32
2	20	15	20	14
3	13	12	13	10
4	7	3	5	3
5	2	4	4	3
6	3	1	1	2
7	1	1	2	3

Table II.4

Number of GCSEs A-D: Intermediate students (by vocational area)

	Art & Design %	Business %	Health & Social Care %	Leisure & Tourism %
0	7	7	9	4
1	9	15	17	13
2	15	13	8	14
3	14	16	10	15
4	16	15	15	22
5	16	10	13	12
6	13	16	12	13
7	10	7	16	7

Table II.5

Number of GCSEs A-C: Advanced students (by vocational area)

	Art & Design (N = 132) %	Business (N = 288) %	Health & Social Care (N = 70) %	Leisure & Tourism (N = 84) %
0	5	10	13	8
1	14	9	4	12
2	13	13	14	16
3	21	17	13	14
4	14	14	27	12
5	16	14	14	14
6	10	10	10	7
7	3	8	3	12
8+	4	5	2	5

Figure II.6

Average number of GCSE grades A–C and A–D achieved by Advanced students: FE colleges

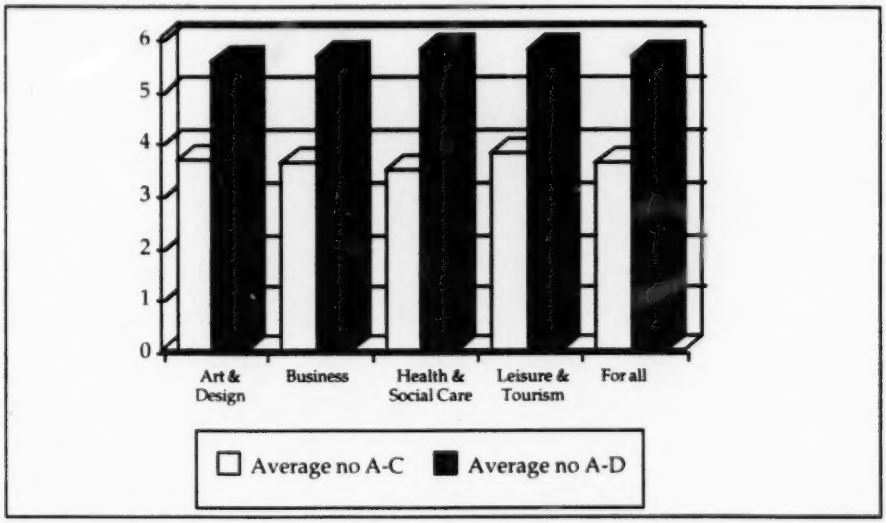


Figure II.7

Average number of GCSE grades A–C and A–D achieved by Advanced students: schools

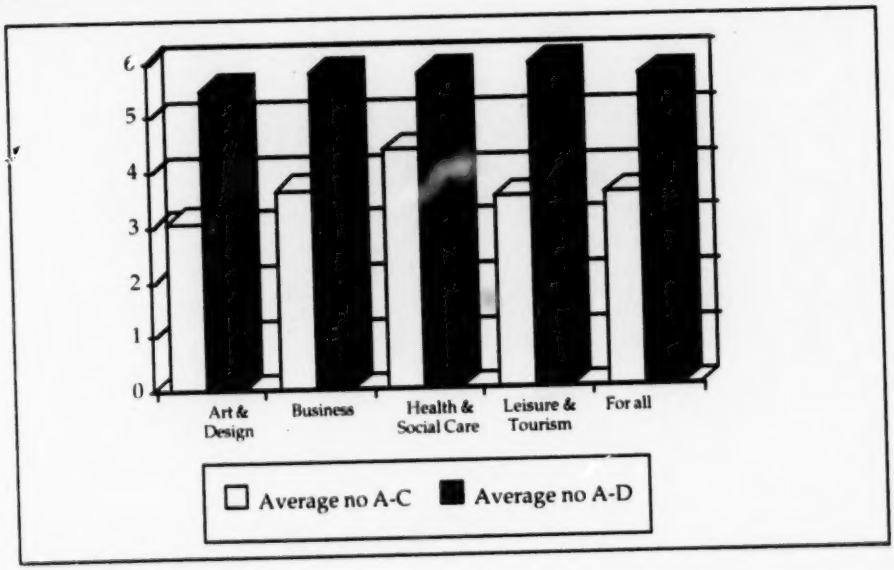


Figure II.8

Average number of GCSE grades A–C and A–D achieved by Advanced students: sixth form college

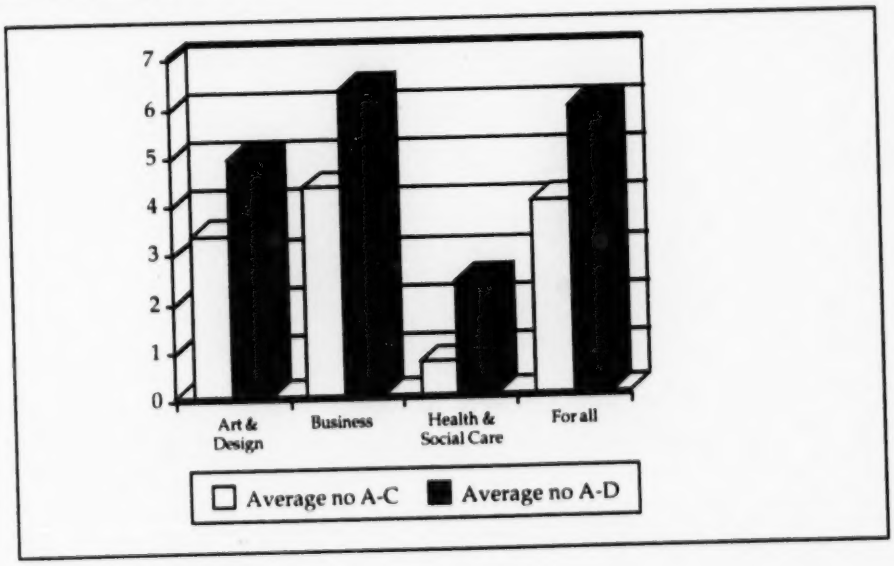


Table II.9

Percentages obtaining high grades on selected GCSEs: total student sample* (Intermediate and Advanced students combined)

	Art & Design	Business	Health & Social Care	Leisure & Tourism	Total
English**					
C+	49	55	54	53	55
A or B	13	10	4	10	11
Maths					
C+	26	38	21	23	29
A or B	1	6	1	1	3
Combined Science					
C+	21	30	24	23	22
A or B	3	7	5	4	4
Art (taken by less than 50% of the group)					
C+	76				56
A or B	48				30

* Percentages apply to those providing a grade
** English Combined *or* English Language

Table II.10

Rationale for the introduction of GNVQs and qualifications replaced (if any)

Art & Design

	Schools	VIth form colleges	FE colleges
Advanced			
New venture	100%	33%	46%
Replace BTEC ND	—	33%	31%
Replace A Level	—	33%	8%
Replace other/unspecified	—	—	15%
N	4	3	13
Intermediate			
New venture	86%	67%	47%
Replace BTEC First	—	—	42%
Replace DVE/CPVE	14%	33%	—
Replace other/unspecified	—	—	11%
N	14	3	19

Business

	Schools	VIth form colleges	FE colleges
Advanced			
New venture	85%	63%	15%
Replace BTEC ND	—	25%	70%
Replace A Level	—	—	—
Replace other/unspecified	15%	12%	15%
N	27	8	27
Intermediate			
New venture	62%	43%	21%
Replace BTEC First	5%	14%	55%
Replace DVE/CPVE	22%	14%	3%
Replace GCSE resits	3%	29%	—
Replace NVQ	—	—	3%
Replace other/unspecified	7%	—	17%
N	58	7	29

Health & Social Care

	Schools	VIth form colleges	FE colleges
Advanced			
New venture	50%	60%	22%
Replace BTEC ND	—	40%	61%
Replace A Level	50%	—	—
Replace GCSE resits	—	—	6%
Replace other/unspecified	—	—	11%
N	2	5	18
Intermediate			
New venture	71%	50%	35%
Replace BTEC First	—	33%	48%
Replace DVE/CPVE	24%	17%	7%
Replace other/unspecified	5%	—	10%
N	38	6	29

Leisure & Tourism

	Schools	VIth form colleges	FE colleges
Advanced			
New venture	86%	75%	19%
Replace BTEC ND	—	25%	75%
Replace other/unspecified	14%	—	6%
N	7	4	16
Intermediate			
New venture	74%	50%	42%
Replace BTEC First	7%	17%	46%
Replace DVE/CPVE	16%	33%	8%
Replace other/unspecified	3%	—	4%
N	31	6	24

Manufacturing—Intermediate

	Schools	VIth form colleges	FE colleges
New venture	44%	—	75%
Replace DVE/CPVE	44%	100%	25%
Replace other/unspecified	11%	—	—
N	9	1	4

Table II.
Achievement in Maths and Science GCSEs for those progressing immediately to GNVQs and those 'deferring' for a year or more

	All Advanced students (n = 597)	Those taking GCSEs in 1993 (n = 277)	Those taking GCSEs in 1992 (n = 191)	Those taking GCSEs before 1992 (n = 83)
Average maths mark*	3.097 (n = 558)	3.361 (n = 269)	2.836 (n = 183)	2.877 (n = 73)
% gaining A or B in maths**	6.5; 6.0	8.2; 7.9	4.9; 4.7	4.1; 3.6
Average science mark*	3.076 (n = 499	3.276 (n = 243)	2.845 (n = 174	2.926 (n = 54)

* Average marks calculated with U = 0, F = 1, E = 2, etc.

** The first figure is as a percentage of students who actually attempted the subject; the second figure is as a percentage of the whole cohort for each year.

APPENDIX IIB

Intermediate GNVQs 1993-4: Approximate registrations and reported numbers gaining full awards

	Approximate registrations*	Full awards gained in 1993-4
Art &Design	5000	2080
Business	14500	6640
Health & Social Care	10500	4038
Leisure & Tourism	6500	2416
Manufacturing	1000	260
TOTAL	**37500**	**15587**

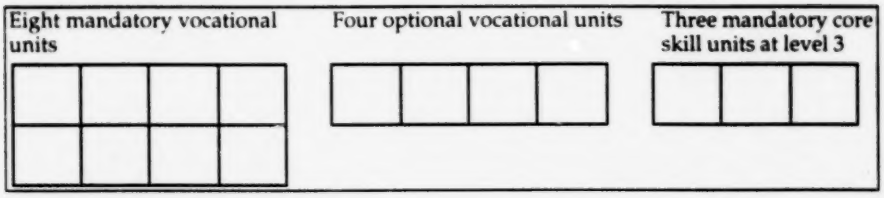
** to nearest 500*

APPENDIX III

The structure of GNVQs

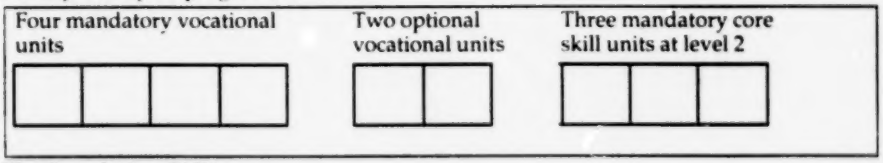
The Advanced GNVQ

Usually a two year programme.



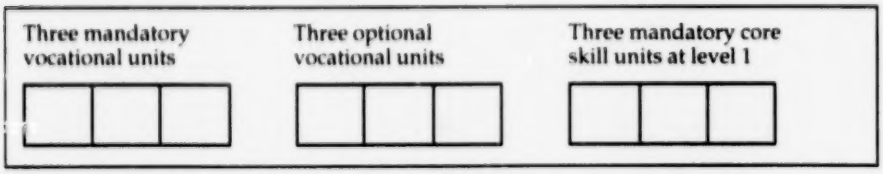
The Intermediate GNVQ

Usually a one year programme.



The Foundation GNV

Usually a one year programme.



THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK*

NVQ level	Description	GNVQ level	Broadly equivalent to
5	Professional Middle Management	*	Higher Education
4	Higher Technician Junior Management	*	
3	Technician Advanced Craft Supervisor	**Advanced**	2+ GCE A levels (or equivalent in AS)
2	Basic Craft	**Intermediate**	4-5 GCSEs at grades A-C or National Curriculum level 7
1	Foundation	**Foundation**	4 GCSEs at grades D-G or National Curriculum levels 5/6

* GNVQs are currently only available at the first three levels although NCVQ has been asked to explore the need for higher level GNVQs.

Adapted from DFE/Welsh Office leaflets: An Introduction to Vocational Qualifications (1992) and GNVQs: The new vocational A level - A brief guide (1993)

APPENDIX IV

Future project activities

During the next phase of this project it is proposed to extend the survey to include, in addition to the five GNVQ areas already being examined, three additional titles: Construction and the Built Environment, Hospitality and Catering and Science. We shall attempt to determine whether distinctive patterns of enrolment and delivery are emerging in areas which are seen as essentially vocational (Construction and the Built Environment, Hospitality and Catering), and in a GNVQ which is not essentially a reworking of a traditional vocational course (Science). There is an expectation and hope that Science GNVQs will attract a new student population into science, and characteristics of Science GNVQ students will be compared carefully with those of other GNVQ groups, and with previous BTEC and GCE A-level science cohorts, in order to see whether there is evidence of 'new' recruitment patterns.

In addition, we shall be following up the respondents to the 1993-4 student questionnaire to obtain detailed information on completion, achievement and progression. This will provide the first national data set of this type for GNVQ students. We shall also be collecting data from new students in the 1994-5 cohort, and following up centres involved in the 1993-4 survey to determine to what extent patterns and practices have changed over the course of a year.

We shall continue to consult with NCVQ, the Awarding Bodies, administrators and policy-makers throughout the next phase of the research. Further reports are planned, and the final report of the project will be available in late 1995 or early 1996.

APPENDIX V

FURTHER READING

General

Education and Training for the 21st Century (White Paper): HMSO 1991 (priced)
Outcomes. NVQs and the Emerging Model of Education and Training: Gilbert Jessup. Falmer 1991 (priced)

Assessment

Assessment Issues and Problems in a Criterion-Based System: Alison Wolf - FEU 1993
Examining Assessment - Assessment Issues & Regimes in post-16 Education & Training: FEU 1994

Core Skills

Core Skills in Action: FEU 1992

European Comparisons

Vocational Education & Training in Europe: A Four Country Study in Four Employment Sectors: FEU 1992
The Academic Achievement of Craft Apprentices in France and England: Contrasting Systems and Common Dilemmas: Alison Wolf and Marie-Thérèse Rapiau, Comparative Education 29, 1, 1993
Mathematics for Vocational Students in France and England: Contrasting Provision and Consequences: Alison Wolf, National Institute of Economic and Social Research Discussion Paper 23, 1992
Educational Provision, Educational Attainment and the Needs of Industry: A Review of Research for Germany, Japan, the USA and Britain: A. Green and H. Steedman. National Institute of Economic and Social Research Report Series No. 5, 1993
Strategies for Vocational Education and Training in Europe: ed. Jean Gordon and David Parkes (European Institute of Education and Social Policy). Association of Vocational Colleges International, 1992

GNVQs

Introducing GNVQs: FEU 1993
Planning, Co-ordinating and Managing the GNVQ Curriculum: FEU 1994
Progression from GNVQs to Higher Education: FEU/UCAS 1994
Implementing GNVQs - A Manual: FEU 1994 (priced)
GNVQs - Proposals for the New Qualifications - A Consultation Paper: NCVQ 1991
Responses to the Consultation Paper on GNVQs: NCVQ 1992 (priced)
GNVQs and Higher Education: NCVQ 1994 (priced)
GNVQ Briefing Note: NCVQ 1994
GNVQ Quality Framework: NCVQ 1994
GNVQs in Schools 1993/4: Quality and Standards of General National Vocational Qualifications. Office for Standards in Education, HMSO, 1994 (priced)
Lessons from the First Phase Advanced GNVQ Applicants to HE — 1994 UCAS Applicants: Judith Compton, UCAS, 1994
Audit Commission Report — Unfinished Business: 1994
Dispatches Report on Education: *All Our Futures: Britain's Education Revolution*: Alan Smithers. Channel Four Television 1993
NCVQ also publish the specifications for all GNVQ titles, the Core Skills, the GNVQ Grading Criteria and examples of students assessed work.

NVQs

National Vocational Qualifications and Further Education: Edited by Mike Bees and Madeleine Swords - Kogan Page in association with NCVQ 1990
Implications of Competence Based Curricula: FEU 1989
Vocational Education and Training - Briefing Notes for Further Education - Administrative, Business and Commercial NVQs: FEU 1991
National Vocational Qualifications and the Construction Craft Industry: FEU 1992

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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